

# FOOD MATTERS

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## REDUCING YOUR ESTABLISHMENT'S RISK OF HEPATITIS A

**H**epatitis A is an infectious disease easily spread through food. In 2013, the Health Department identified nine food workers with hepatitis A at three different New York City food establishments. As a result, the Department vaccinated more than 5,000 employees and customers. By cooperating with the Department's investigation and response, the affected establishments avoided additional hepatitis A cases.

### How Hepatitis A is Transmitted

Hepatitis A is usually transmitted through fecal contamination during food preparation. Restaurant outbreaks typically occur when a sick food worker prepares ready-to-eat food without properly washing his or her hands after using the bathroom.

### The Health Department's Response to Hepatitis A Outbreaks

When a hepatitis A outbreak occurs, the Health Department sends a team of specially trained doctors and health inspectors to investigate. The investigators interview staff and customers and test food workers. The Health Department may temporarily close the restaurant and prohibit infected employees from working while they are still contagious.

The Department also provides a temporary hepatitis A vaccination clinic for employees and patrons who may have been exposed to infection and promotes the clinic publicly, including through media outreach.

### Steps to Reduce the Risk of an Outbreak

Proper hygiene and good sanitary practices are the best ways to prevent hepatitis A. Remind employees to wash their hands after using the bathroom and before working with food. Stock bathrooms with soap and paper towels or a hot-air dryer, and remind workers to use gloves or other barriers such as deli paper, tongs or utensils when preparing or serving ready-to-eat food. These steps are required by the Health Code and will help you achieve an A grade, avoid fines and—most importantly—keep your staff and customers safe.

Consider offering your employees free hepatitis A vaccines. People who are vaccinated do not spread the disease.

To learn more, visit [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov) and search for Hepatitis.

## RESTAURANT GRADING PROGRAM: LATEST UPDATES

**B**eginning in spring 2014, the Health Department will implement changes to the restaurant inspection program. Some of these changes are the result of new legislation crafted by the Department and the City Council:

- ◆ Offering low-cost and penalty-free consultations to restaurant owners.

*(Continued on Page 2)*

**RESTAURANT GRADING PROGRAM: LATEST UPDATES**

(Continued from Page 1)

- ◆ Establishing an ombuds office to answer restaurateurs' inspection questions.
- ◆ Developing an inspection code of conduct and sharing it with owners.
- ◆ Providing inspection details and results via the City's OpenData portal on [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov).
- ◆ Establishing fixed penalties for sustained violations to improve predictability and reduce overall fines by about 15%.
- ◆ Eliminating all fines for sustained sanitary violations at initial inspections if a business's total score after the Health Tribunal hearing is less than 14 points.

**PREPARING RAW PRODUCE SAFELY**

Americans' growing consumption of fruits and vegetables has generated an increase in associated food-borne disease outbreaks. These outbreaks can prove extremely harmful, even deadly. In August 2011, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) traced four strains of *listeria monocytogenes* to Rocky Ford melons produced by Jensen Farms in Holly, Colorado. The outbreak—the deadliest in the U.S. since 1924—ultimately infected 139 people in 28 states and killed 29, including two from New York. CDC officials identified unsanitary packing conditions and dirty equipment as the likely cause. More recently, a multistate outbreak of *Salmonella Saintpaul* between January and April 2013 was linked to imported cucumbers from Mexico. Eighty-four people across 18 states were infected, and 17 were hospitalized.

This information will help you minimize the threat of foodborne illness from raw produce:

**Foods with the Greatest Contamination Risk**

- ◆ melons (cantaloupes, water melon, honey dew)
- ◆ leafy greens, such as spinach and lettuce
- ◆ raw seed sprouts (alfalfa)
- ◆ unpasteurized juices and cider



**How to Protect Your Customers**

- ◆ Remind employees to wash their hands thoroughly before preparing these foods.
- ◆ Ensure that employees avoid bare hand contact by wearing gloves or using other barriers (tongs or paper) when preparing ready-to-eat foods.
- ◆ Remove the outer leaves of lettuce, cabbage and leafy vegetables.
- ◆ Implement the first in, first out (FIFO) inventory method by using and selling the oldest items first.
- ◆ Discard all damaged and bruised produce.
- ◆ Avoid serving raw seed sprouts (alfalfa, clover, radish and mung bean sprouts) to children, older adults, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems.
- ◆ Wash produce under warm running water just before consuming, cutting, juicing or cooking, even if you plan to peel or slice it. Use a fruit brush to clean cantaloupes, watermelons or other fruit with a firm rind. Do not wash fruits and vegetables with soap or bleach. Use separate cutting boards for produce and meats.
- ◆ Clean and sanitize cutting boards and utensils between uses.
- ◆ Keep all sliced fruits and vegetables at 41° F or below, or follow the Time as a Public Health Control rule.

To learn more, visit [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov) and search for Food Service Owners.

**NEW CALCUTTER MOBILE APP FOR CHEFS**

The Health Department launched a free mobile app—CalCutter—that helps restaurant chefs and home cooks track calories in the foods they prepare. The app calculates calories per serving based on ingredients and serving size. It also suggests alternative ingredients or cooking methods that reduce calories. The Department will work with celebrity

chef and *New York Times* bestselling author Rocco DiSpirito to incorporate low-calorie ingredient suggestions into the app.

To download the app, visit [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov) and search for CalCutter.



## LISTEN UP! NOISE EXPOSURE CAN DAMAGE HEARING

**F**ood establishment owners, like all employers, must provide a safe workplace. One workplace hazard that may be overlooked in food service establishments is noise. Some workplaces can have dangerous noise levels, and long-term exposure to sounds above 85 decibels (dBA) can eventually damage hearing. If co-workers have to shout to be heard, noise levels are too high.

Find more information on reducing noise below:

### Possible Noise Hazards

- ◆ loud music
- ◆ noisy equipment (ice machines, dishwashers or compressors)
- ◆ loud ambient noise in the kitchen or dining room

### How Employers Can Reduce Workplace Noise

- ◆ Find out if sound levels are too high. Consult with a sound control engineer to measure sound levels and pinpoint problem areas.

- ◆ Ensure music is kept at a safe volume.
- ◆ Use sound-absorbing materials such as acoustic panels and rubber mats where possible, and incorporate design features that dampen noise.
- ◆ Provide employees with hearing tests and hearing protection if sound levels exceed Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards. For more information, visit <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/noise/hearingconservation/hearingprograms.html>

To learn more about noise controls and the NYC noise code, visit [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov) and search for Noise Code.

To learn more about hearing protection, visit [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov) and search for Noise in the Community.

## SEVERE PENALTIES FOR OBSTRUCTING A FOOD INSPECTION

**N**ew York City Health Code §3.15(a) prohibits anyone from interfering with or obstructing Department personnel in carrying out an inspection. State Sanitary Code §14-1.195 provides that all operators of food service establishments must allow inspectors access to all areas of their establishments for inspection “at all times while the establishment is in operation, whether open to the public for service of food or not. Refusal of admittance, after proper identification, is cause for action to obtain permit revocation and to close.”

Inspectors with the Bureau of Food Safety and Community Sanitation (BFSCS) work days, evenings and weekends, and they conduct unannounced inspections at operating establishments. “Operating” or “in operation” means that one or more food workers in a food service establishment are receiving, preparing, storing or serving food, or that the establishment is open to the public.

Assaulting inspectors, threatening their safety and preventing them from performing their duties are serious offenses that may result in harsh penalties. Obstructive conduct includes verbal harassment or intimidation (cursing, swearing, using profane language, yelling or screaming) or physical interference (inappropriately touching, physically bumping or striking a BFSCS employee). Physical obstructions can be grounds for criminal charges.

The Department may take one or more of the following

actions if an inspector is obstructed from carrying out official agency business:

- ◆ issuing notices of violation for obstruction, resulting in a penalty of up to \$1,000
- ◆ ordering an establishment to close immediately following an incident
- ◆ denying new permit applications
- ◆ suspending or revoking permits after a hearing

### Food Safety Quiz: Test Your Knowledge

1. Foods contaminated by harmful micro-organisms usually have \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. bad taste                      c. change in appearance  
b. bad odor                        d. none of the above
2. Which of the following is **not** necessary for bacteria to grow in food?  
a. nutrients                        c. moisture  
b. light                                d. temperature between 40°F and 140°F
3. Which method is **not** an acceptable way to thaw frozen food?  
a. under cold running water      c. at room temperature on a clean surface  
b. in a refrigerator                d. in a microwave oven, when it is part of a continuous cooking process
4. What is the best place to store cooked or prepared foods in order to prevent cross-contamination?  
a. above raw foods                c. next to raw foods  
b. below raw foods                d. none of the above

Answer Key  
#1 d, #2 b, #3 c, #4 a

## EFFECTIVE PEST MANAGEMENT

**R**estaurants are particularly vulnerable to infestation by mice, roaches, flies and rats, and the Health Department finds signs of pests in nearly a quarter of all inspections. Pests are attracted to the food, water and shelter readily available in a busy restaurant. Keep your restaurant pest-free by practicing proper sanitation and preventing pests' entry. Inspect your restaurant frequently, and when infestations occur, hire a professional.

Follow these guidelines to prevent pests:

### Remove Grease, Oil and Food Particles

Environments that attract flies are bound to attract other pests. Clean more often when you see flies, and pay attention to these areas:

- ▶ all surfaces and equipment, including the floor underneath equipment
- ▶ range hoods
- ▶ food preparation surfaces
- ▶ grease traps
- ▶ garbage storage areas
- ▶ garbage pick-up locations

### Manage Your Garbage and Recycling

- ▶ Keep enough garbage containers to hold all garbage between pick-ups. Use hard plastic or metal cans with tight fitting lids.
- ▶ Bring garbage containers and bags to the curb as close to pick-up time as possible.
- ▶ Use heavy-duty plastic garbage bags at least 1.9 millimeters thick.

### Monitor Your Inventory and Remove Clutter

- ▶ Throw out old boxes and containers.
- ▶ Store everything at least six inches off the floor and away from walls.
- ▶ Follow the first in, first out (FIFO) inventory rule by using and selling your oldest items first.
- ▶ Inspect deliveries before storing. Pests can hide in delivery boxes.

### Shut Pests Out

- ▶ Seal all cracks, crevices and holes in walls and cabinets and any gaps around pipes and other openings.
- ▶ Store food in glass, plastic or metal containers with tight fitting lids.
- ▶ Close gaps under doors, and install rodent-resistant metal door sweeps on outside doors.
- ▶ Put screens on windows and vents.
- ▶ Use cement to fill large holes and cracks in the sidewalk, rear yard or building foundation.

### Cooperate With Your Pest Management Professional

Only hire pest management companies licensed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Work with professionals to develop a plan for preventing and managing pests, and follow their advice.

To learn how to choose a high quality pest control professional, visit the NYC Rat Information Portal found at [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov).



If you have questions or comments regarding this newsletter, please call the Health Academy. Important telephone numbers are listed below.

### General Information ☎ 311

**OATH HEALTH TRIBUNAL**  
66 John Street, 11th floor  
New York, NY 10038  
☎ (212) 361-1000

**BUREAU OF FOOD SAFETY & COMMUNITY SANITATION**  
125 Worth Street, 10th Floor  
Box CN59A  
New York, NY 10013  
☎ (212) 676-1600

**CITYWIDE LICENSING CENTER**  
42 Broadway, 5th Floor  
New York, NY 10004  
☎ (212) 487-4436

**INSPECTOR GENERAL**  
80 Maiden Lane  
New York, NY 10005  
☎ (212) 825-2141

**HEALTH ACADEMY**  
413 East 120 Street  
2nd Floor  
New York, NY 10035  
☎ (917) 492-6990

## NEW ONLINE FOOD SAFETY VIDEOS



**H**aving employees watch simple videos can be an effective way to teach food safety. Two new videos are available:

*Hand-Washing Sinks:* Learn about the importance of hand-washing sinks. If you prepare food, you must have a separate hand-washing station near each food preparation area and in each restroom.

*Keeping Food Safe by Keeping Track of Time:* Learn about holding food safely before serving. If you serve food to customers, it is important to monitor the food's temperature and the time it is held at room temperature.

To view these online videos, visit [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov), and search for Food Service Owners.



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