

Avoiding Cross-Contamination in Food

The last thing any restaurant owner or operator wants to hear is a complaint from a customer about food poisoning. Word travels fast and complaints such as these can mean the difference between a restaurant's success or failure.

Microbiologist Elena Connors has been in the industry for over 30 years and in that time, she has seen first hand some of the biggest culprits. One of the biggest causes of concern, she says, is food cross-contamination.

“Cross-contamination of food can happen so easily. Most restaurants have multiple kitchen staff and a lot of staff turn-over so training is always an issue. But there are simple steps to follow that can protect the food you serve and your customers.”

Connors offers several tips on how restaurant owners as well as kitchen and serving staff can improve their handling of food.

According to Connors, food can be protected from bacterial diseases by taking the following simple measures:

- All food (especially meat) must be cooked thoroughly.

Sounds like an obvious solution however, in the rush and flurry of kitchen activity cutting corners on the length of time food items are cooked is a common issue.

“Bacteria can grow on everything especially on protein foods: meats including poultry and seafood, dairy products and vegetables such as beans,” Connors said.

- Never mix raw meat with ready-to-eat food.

Not properly cleaning preparation surfaces, before putting other cooked items on them is a recipe for disaster. Connors warns this is a common practice and one of the leading causes of cross contamination. For example, she says never have raw chicken next to cheese.

- Hand washing and good personnel hygiene as well as good sanitation of equipment and utensils.

Everyone knows washing your hands frequently while preparing food is not just a good practice but a requirement. However, Connors says, many kitchen staff and food servers rarely take the time to do it. This is where owners, managers and supervisors need to ensure these safety policies are clearly posted and staff receives proper training.

Overall, Connors says, most of the cross contamination can be avoided with the education of personnel.

“Bacteria may be present everywhere. Proper processing and cooking of foods can control bacteria.

By Elena Connors - Impact Microbiology Services Ltd

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