



Volunteer Leader Training Guide

Food Safety in the Workplace: How to Keep Your Lunch From Being Tossed!

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Introduction

Did you ever get ticked off because someone at work threw out your lunch? You or someone you know may have experienced getting their food thrown out of the refrigerator at work or at home. Food safety in the workplace is very important. In order to prevent the spread of bacteria, and the disposal of a coworker's food, everyone should know how to properly clean and sanitize the kitchen or break room. In addition, workers should be aware of food storage rules in the refrigerator and pantry. Proper sanitation will help to maintain a clean and bacteria-free area where people feel comfortable eating lunch.

Target Audience

- EHC leaders
- Adult audiences

Objectives

The participants will learn how to:

- Reduce the risk of foodborne illness in the workplace.
- Store food properly.
- Properly clean and sanitize the kitchen, break room and refrigerator.

Main Teaching Points

- Significance of foodborne illness
- Food storage practices
- Sanitizing the kitchen or break room after lunch

Lesson Materials

- Handout 1: Refrigerator and Freezer Storage Times
- Handout 2: Removing Odors From the Refrigerator
- Handout 3: Storage Times for Food in the Pantry
- Handout 4: Making Chlorine Bleach Sanitizing Solutions
- Handout 5: Evaluation Survey

Suggestions for Teaching

- Review the lesson introduction and study the major teaching points.
- Make copies of the following:
 - Handout 1: Refrigerator and Freezer Storage Times
 - Handout 2: Removing Odors From the Refrigerator
 - Handout 3: Storage Times for Food in the Pantry
 - Handout 4: Making Chlorine Bleach Sanitizing Solutions
 - Handout 5: Evaluation Survey

Foodborne Illness

- Foodborne illness comes from eating food or drinking beverages contaminated with disease-causing microorganisms, such as bacteria, viruses, molds and parasites.
- The symptoms of foodborne illness can range from flu-like – nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramps and dehydration – to more severe symptoms including kidney failure, miscarriages, difficulty breathing, paralysis and death.
- Symptoms may occur within a few hours after eating a contaminated food or in as long as a few weeks to a couple of months afterwards.
- Data from the CDC report that approximately 76 million Americans get sick and 5,000 die from foodborne illness each year.

Reducing the Risk of Foodborne Illness

- Always wash your hands with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds before eating and preparing food. Also, wash kitchen or break room surfaces with a safe cleaning solution. Bacteria can spread throughout the area and onto cutting boards, knives, sponges, countertops and food.
- Spoilage bacteria can cause food to spoil and look or smell bad. Food should be stored under the proper conditions to keep bacteria from growing.
- Food spoilage is a warning sign that conditions may be right for pathogens to grow in food, so throw out spoiled food.

Keeping a Clean and Safe Refrigerator

Review Handouts 1, **Refrigerator and Freezer Storage Times**, and Handout 2, **Removing Odors From the Refrigerator**.

- Always keep the temperature of the refrigerator at 40° F or below and the temperature of the freezer at 0° F or below. Pathogenic bacteria can grow rapidly in the “Danger Zone,” which is the temperature range between 40° and 140° F. Use an appliance thermometer to monitor the temperature of the refrigerator.
- Wipe up spills immediately. Clean all surfaces thoroughly with hot, soapy water and then rinse.
- To eliminate odors, place an opened box of baking soda on a shelf. Use a vinegar and water mixture to thoroughly clean the interior, and always avoid using solvent cleaning agents, abrasives and all cleansers. This may affect the taste of the food and cause damage to the interior finish of your refrigerator.
- To clean the exterior of the refrigerator, use a soft cloth and mild liquid dishwashing detergent and cleansers and polishes made for cleaning appliances.

Storage Times and Rules

- Store fruits, vegetables, meats, poultry and cheese on adjustable shelves, door bins, crispers and meat/cheese drawers.
- Develop a schedule and policy for cleaning the refrigerator. All food in the refrigerator that is moldy or expired should be thrown out. Post a sign on the refrigerator so that everyone will be aware of the rules.
- Once a week throw out perishable foods that should not be eaten. Leftovers should not be kept in the refrigerator for more than four days, and raw poultry and ground meats should only be kept for one to two days and should be sealed in a container or wrapped securely to prevent juices from contaminating other foods.
- Remember to place a note or name on plastic bags, lunch bags and containers of food. Check with the bag or container owner before tossing food during the cleaning period.

Storing Food in the Pantry

Review Handout 3, **Storage Times for Food in the Pantry.**

- Make sure to label all food with a name and date to prevent tossing of new food items.
- Keep the pantry dry and the temperature between 50° to 70° F.
- Flour, sugar, dry cereals and snacks should be kept in a sealed container.
- Do not store food on the floor. Store it on shelves that are at least 6-8 inches off the floor so that you are able to clean the floor underneath the shelves.
- Do not store any chemicals such as cleansers near food in the pantry.

Cleaning the Kitchen or Break Room

Review Handout 4, **Making Chlorine Bleach Sanitizing Solution.**

- To properly clean the eating area, make a chlorine bleach sanitizing solution.
- Mix the solution according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Never mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser, and wear rubber gloves and eye protection. Do not breathe in bleach fumes, and open windows and doors to get fresh air.
- Use paper towels or cloth towels that can be washed afterwards to wipe up spills and to clean surfaces.
- Never leave dishes in the sink. To properly wash dishes, begin with hot water and a detergent solution, next rinse in clean water and then sanitize the dishes. Finally, place dishes onto the dish drainer to air dry.
- Use the cleaning solution on food contact surfaces such as cutting boards, countertops, tables and other stationary equipment.

Conclusion

Foodborne illness can occur in the workplace at any time; hence, precautions should be taken when cleaning and storing food in the kitchen or break room. Practicing simple food storage and sanitizing rules while at work will aid in preventing bacteria and pathogen exposure during and after the use of the kitchen or break room. Hand washing should also be practiced in the workplace, especially at lunch time, to decrease the spread of contamination of harmful bacteria. Lastly, during the cleaning process, remember to carefully follow the bleach cleaning steps in

order to properly sanitize the kitchen or break room. These helpful practices will keep workers happy knowing their food is not only safe from harmful bacteria and pathogens, but also from other coworkers who may accidentally toss out their food.

References

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