

## Chapter 6 – Employee Health and Hygiene

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Employee health and hygiene (directly or indirectly) plays a significant role in food safety and sanitation. Sick employees and poor hygienic practices are a significant cause of foodborne disease outbreaks.

**Direct employee sources of foodborne disease organisms** are the following:

- Sick employees
- Normal flora
- Transient microorganisms

### **SICK EMPLOYEES**

Individuals are subject to several communicable diseases that contribute to food contamination. These are listed in **Idaho Reportable Diseases**, a regulation of the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. Specifically, the diseases and conditions of concern are the following:

- Amebiasis
- Campylobacteriosis
- Cholera
- Diarrhea (until common communicable causes have been ruled out)
- Diphtheria
- *E. coli* O157:H7\*
- Giardiasis
- Hepatitis A\*
- Norovirus\*
- Salmonellosis\*
- Shigellosis\*
- Staphylococcal skin infections
- Streptococcal skin infections
- Taeniasis
- Active tuberculosis
- Vomiting (until non-infectious cause is identified)

\* These diseases are commonly called *The Big 5*. A food worker diagnosed with any of *The Big 5* is not allowed to work in the food establishment until clearance is provided by a physician or Public Health District. See pages 35 and 36 for a printable handout regarding exclusion and restriction of food establishment employees.

Because of the potential communicability of these diseases and conditions, the following requirement ***must be strictly followed*** at all times:

**IDAHO HEALTH RULES AND REGULATIONS PROHIBIT ANY PERSON WHO IS INFECTED WITH A DISEASE THAT CAN BE TRANSMITTED BY FOOD TO WORK AS A FOOD HANDLER THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNICABLE STAGE FOR THAT DISEASE.**

It is the responsibility of the employee to inform the license holder, or person in charge, of such illness. In turn, the license holder or person-in-charge has the responsibility to ensure compliance with this requirement and to notify health officials if a disease or outbreak is suspected.

Symptoms of these diseases can include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, jaundice, sore throat with fever, and/or abdominal pain. Workers with these symptoms must not be allowed to work with food as the worker can easily transmit the disease through contact with the food. It is the responsibility of the person in charge to exclude food workers with any of these symptoms. For guidance on this issue, the PIC should contact the local Public Health District.

### NORMAL FLORA

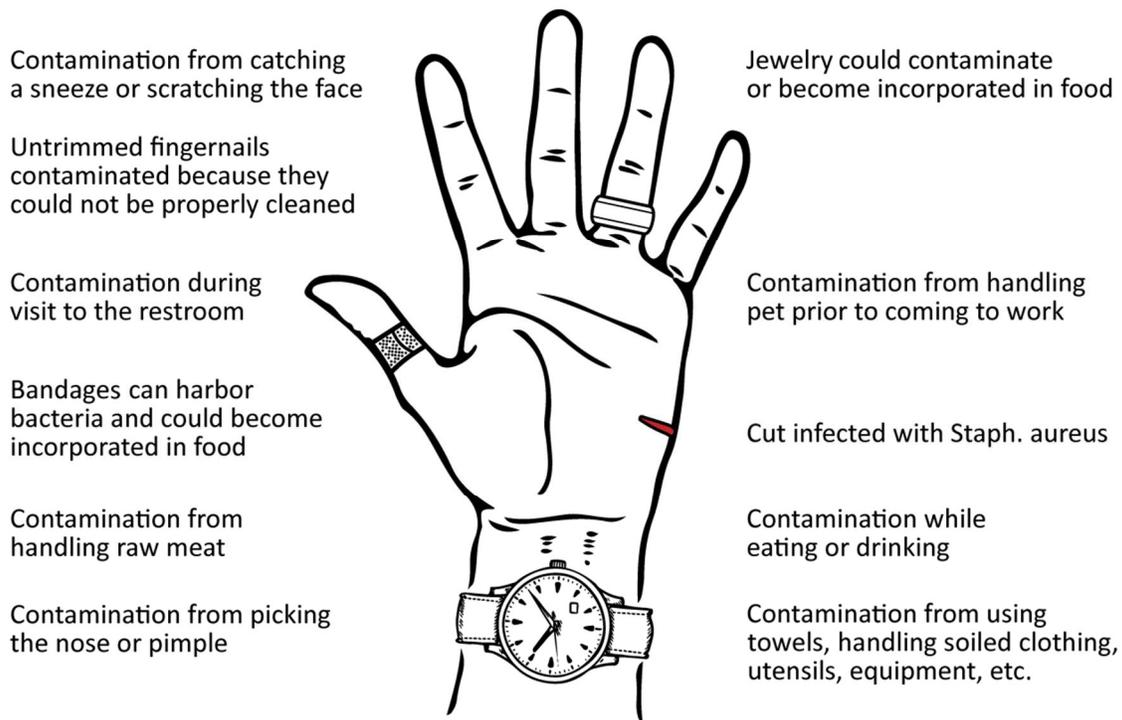
People normally carry some bacteria on or in their bodies that can cause foodborne diseases. These are called "normal flora" and most people are unaware that they carry these bacteria. For example, almost two-thirds of the population are carriers of the bacteria that cause Clostridium perfringens food poisoning and one out of every three persons has Staphylococcus aureus in their nasal passages as normal flora. The simple act of touching the nose or blowing the nose is sufficient to contaminate the hands with these significant disease-causing bacteria.

### TRANSIENT MICROORGANISMS

There are transient microorganisms found on the body, particularly the hands, which are transferred during contact with food, utensils and other sources that may become contaminated.

### HANDS

Hands play an essential role in the prevention of foodborne illnesses. **One of the simplest, most important things that can be done in a food establishment is for employees to wash hands often.** The following illustration demonstrates some of the ways hands can become contaminated.



## **WASHING HANDS**

Because hands are a critical factor in the transmission of organisms, they must be properly washed and washed often. Effective washing can only be accomplished when jewelry is not worn, fingernails are trimmed, and adequate handwashing facilities are provided and used.

Handwashing is not effective unless a good lather is built up and all portions of the hands and lower arms are vigorously friction-rubbed for **20 to 30 seconds**.

Handwashing includes the following steps: Turn on warm water, apply soap and rub vigorously for at least 20 seconds, rinse with warm water, dry hands with a paper towel, and turn off water with paper towel.

Handwashing can be enhanced by using a fingernail brush, lathering twice, and a post-washing sanitizer dip.

## **WHEN TO WASH HANDS**

The following list can serve as a guide for when to wash hands:

- Immediately prior to engaging in food establishment operations;
- After using the restroom;
- Before handling food, food-contact surfaces, equipment, or utensils;
- Before putting on gloves to work with food;
- After eating, drinking, using tobacco, coughing, sneezing, or touching the face or head;
- After handling raw meat, poultry, and seafood when cross-contamination can occur;
- After handling garbage, dirty dishes, or soiled equipment;
- After handling personal belongings (e.g., street clothing, purses, wallets, cosmetics); and
- At any other time during work hours as necessary to keep hands clean.

## **INJURIES**

Injuries on the hands and lower portions of the arms such as cuts, abrasions, burns, and even a hangnail must be cleaned and treated immediately. These injuries can become infected and contribute to the contamination of food and equipment with disease-causing organisms.

Finger and surface bandages contribute to contamination. Bandages can be lost and become incorporated into food. To prevent food and surface contamination from an infected injury or bandage, wear a plastic or rubber glove over the injured hand until the injury is healed.

## **OTHER HYGIENIC PRACTICES**

The following additional hygienic practices must be followed:

- Employees working with food should wear clothing such as hats, hair covering or nets, beard restraints, and clothing that covers body hair, that are designed and worn to effectively keep their hair from contacting exposed food, equipment, utensils, linens, and unwrapped single-use articles.

- Do not smoke, drink, or eat in food preparation and dishwashing areas. Contamination of hands, food, and food-contact surfaces with saliva that can harbor disease-causing organisms can occur. Employees must take breaks to smoke, drink, and eat in designated areas.
- Do not wash hands in sinks designated for food preparation or equipment and utensil washing to avoid food, equipment, and utensil contamination.
- Do not dry hands on towels used repeatedly or by other employees, wiping cloths, aprons, or clothing.

### **SUMMARY**

- Sick employees and poor hygienic practices are major causes of foodborne disease outbreaks.
- Health regulations prohibit persons who are sick with a disease that can be transmitted by food to work as a food handler for as long as the illness is in a communicable stage. Some diseases require a doctor's note or health district clearance before you can return to work.
- Hands are an important source of contamination that can contribute to foodborne disease outbreaks.
- Hands must be properly washed and washed often to remove disease organisms.
- Wash hands with a good lather and vigorously friction rub for 20 to 30 seconds.
- Hands need to be washed **after using the toilet** and as often as necessary to keep the hands and exposed portions of the arms clean.
- Injuries need to be properly cleaned, treated and protected to prevent contamination.
- **Do not smoke, drink or eat in food preparation and dishwashing areas.**
- Do not use a common towel.

**Reference: *Idaho Food Code*, Chapter 2**

# EMPLOYEE HEALTH

Any employee that is diagnosed with or exposed to the following illnesses cannot report or return to work until authorized by a health practitioner or the Person In Charge (PIC):

**SEND  
SICK  
EMPLOYEES  
HOME  
NOW**

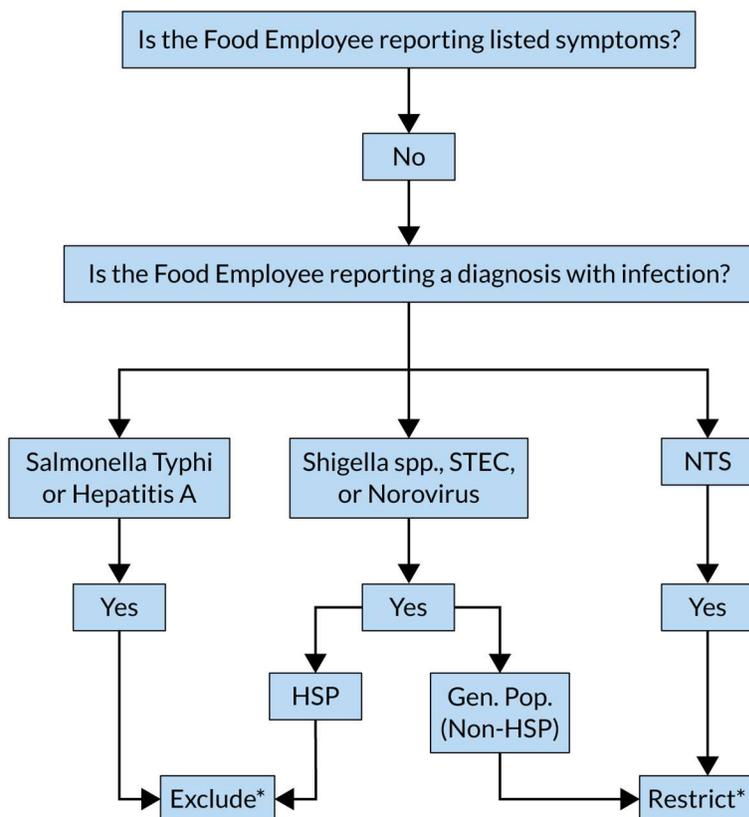
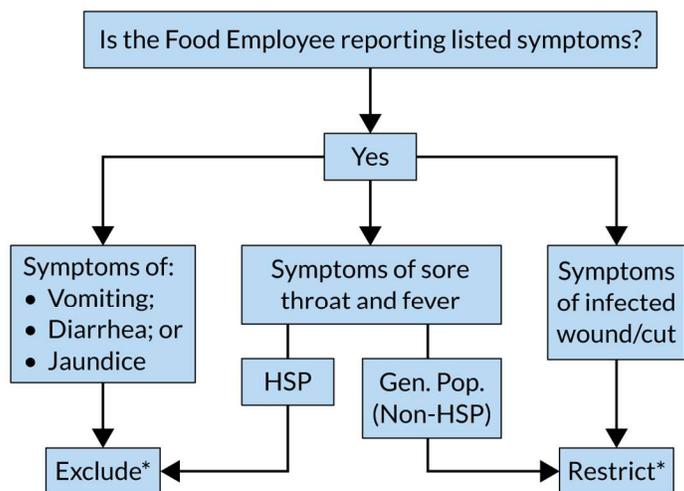
**Salmonella  
Shigella  
E. coli  
Hepatitis A  
Norovirus**

Any employee that displays the following symptoms cannot work with or near food:

- ▶ Vomiting
- ▶ Diarrhea
- ▶ Sore throat with a fever
- ▶ Jaundice (yellowing of skin/sclera)
- ▶ Unprotected and infected wounds



# EMPLOYEE HEALTH DECISION TREE



If the Food Employee is reporting a diagnosis with Hepatitis A virus, NTS or typhoid fever:

Exclude\*

If the Food Employee is reporting:  
• Diagnosis with Shigellosis, Norovirus, or STEC; and  
• Symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea

Exclude\*

Key:

STEC = Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli*  
HSP = Highly Susceptible Population  
NTS = Nontyphoidal *Salmonella*

**\*Contact your local Public Health District** for assistance in determining when to exclude or restrict employees from working with food and when they can return to work.

Additional information regarding Decision Tree 1 and Decision Tree 2a can be found in Annex 3 of the 2017 FDA Food Code on pages 374-375. (2.201.11/2.201.12)

