Food Safety in the Workplace

Each year in Australia there are around 5.4 million cases of food-borne illness, resulting in 2.1 million days of lost work. For any business, this is a significant and potentially avoidable cost.

Foodborne illnesses are caused by eating foods contaminated with harmful microorganisms. While the majority of cases of foodborne diseases are of unknown cause, scientists have identified hundreds of different foodborne illnesses with bacteria and viruses being the most likely causative agents. Common Bacteria; Salmonella, Listeria, E.coli, Clostridium botulinum and Campylobacter jejuni.

The bacteria responsible for these illnesses can be dangerous to human health and may cause long term problems such as kidney damage, acute gastroenteritis, arthritis or heart problems. Poor food safety and handling (cross-contamination of cooked and raw foods, unclean surfaces, and not cooking or chilling food properly) is the most common mistake. Symptoms can be mild or severe, even fatal. The onset can be immediate or within days, weeks or even months following ingestion.

Symptoms include:

- Nausea
- Abdominal cramps
- Diarrhoea or constipation
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Headaches

Most vulnerable to foodborne illness are elderly people, pregnant women, immune-compromised individuals and children.

Food Safe Your Workplace

Harmful bacteria can infect our food at any point in the food chain, from the farm to when it reaches our plate. The good news is, there are precautionary measures you can take to minimise the risk of food-borne illness in your workplace.

Questions to ask yourself?

Food storage and food processing; are suitable measures in place to prevent contamination? Particularly when it comes to thawing, cooling and reheating.

Food for disposal; when is it acceptable to throw away food?

Food handling and hygiene; are you exercising good hygiene practices? (Cleanliness of clothing, washing hands, jewellery, not eating over services).

Hand washing facilities; are they adequate? (Soap, warm running water, single use towel, easily accessible basin).

Cleanliness and sanitation; is equipment, eating and drinking utensils, food contact surfaces completely free from animals or vermin?

Checklist:

- ✓ **When catering**; ensure perishable foods are not left at room temperature for >2 hours
- ✓ **Acknowledge severe food allergies**; be considerate as even a small amount can cause a potentially life-threatening reaction.
- ✓ **Avoid foods with raw eggs.**
- ✓ **Provide chilled storage** and heating facilities for employees.
- ✓ **Encourage the use of chiller bags and ice-blocks**; where refrigerators are not available (e.g. trucks and building sites.)
- ✓ **Provide hand and utensil-washing facilities;** reduces the potential for contamination.
- ✓ **Always wash your hands** prior to handling raw and ready-to eat food, immediately after smoking, coughing or handling similar substances and after using the toilet.
- ✓ **Ensure routine maintenance**; for kitchen appliances.
- ✓ **Keep the work area clean!**

Still finding it hard to get rid of that old communal hand towel?

http://domesblissity.blogspot.com.au/2012/08/24-uses-for-old-towels.html
http://tipnut.com/10-ideas-for-recycling-old-towels/

Welcome to the "Danger Zone"

Bacteria grow rapidly between 5-60 degrees and do not grow at all below -18 degrees Celsius (Frozen food zone).

Food Temperature control is essential. Disease causing bacteria does not always change the appearance, taste or smell of food so it can be hard to spot spoilt food. Perishable foods that have been left out exposed to the "danger zone" for over two hours may pose a risk.

Ensure food if kept **below 5 degrees or above 60 degrees** to prevent bacteria growth.

Potentially hazardous foods:

- Raw/cooked meat or foods containing meats
- Dairy Products; milk and dairy based desserts
- Processed fruits and vegetables; salads
- Seafood
- Cooked rice and pasta
- Sandwiches and rolls
- Foods containing eggs, beans, soy products or other protein rich foods

Generally safe foods (do not contain food poisoning bacteria):

Many preserved foods:

- Dried fruits
- salted/dried meats,
- Yoghurts,
- Hard cheeses

However, some of these foods can become potentially hazardous when altered or processed.

Food Safe Your Home

The principle cause accelerated ripening and decay is ethylene gas. When in contact with ethylene producers, responders will degrade faster. Do not store fruit and vegetables together as fruit tends to produce ethylene whilst vegetables respond. Also be wary of rotting fruit and veg in your refrigerator, removing them from others as mould can easily transfer and spoil fresh produce.

Storing Fruit and Vegetables for optimal shelf life and freshness

Fridge		Room Temperature (Cool dry place, no direct sunlight)	
Fruit	Vegetables	Fruit	Vegetables
Ripe stone fruits e.g. plums, peaches, nectarines, apricots	Bunches of carrots, red radishes and beetroots - removing the leafy tops to make them last much longer than with them attached	Whole melons (e.g. watermelon, cantaloupe or honeydew) move to the fridge when cut	Potatoes - store in a dark, cool, well-ventilated cardboard box or paper bag, away from onions
Apples and pears	Mushrooms, stored in a paper bag	Rambutan	
Ripe Hass avocados	Spring onion (scallions)	Starfruit – fridge when cut	Onions - store in a net or loose in a paper bag or cardboard box, away from potatoes
Paw-paw (on a shelf, not in the crisper as they are chill-sensitive)	Shallots	Unripe stone fruit e.g. plums, apricots and peaches - move to the fridge once ripe	
Berries: blackberries, raspberries, blueberries, strawberries	Broccoli	Bananas	Sweet potatoes
Ripe custard apples	Lettuce	Unripe Hass avocadoes - keep them near bananas to ripen them, then move to the fridge when ripe	
Lychees	Corn	Whole pineapple – fridge when cut	Tomatoes
Figs	Capsicum (Bell Peppers)	Unripe mangoes - move to the fridge once ripe	
Passionfruit	Chillies		Cucumber (uncut - move to the fridge when sliced)
Grapes	Asparagus		
Rhubarb	Fresh Ginger Root		Eggplant (aubergine)

Citrus fruits: lemons, limes, oranges, mandarins, grapefruit	Green Beans	
Quinces	Green Peas	Zucchini
	Leafy vegetables, e.g. spinach and kale	
	Cut Pumpkin	Whole pumpkin
	Brussel Sprouts	
	Cabbage	Garlic
	Celery	
	Turnips	Lemongrass
	Kohlrabi	

Ethylene gas producers: Fruits: apples, apricots, avocados, banana, kiwi fruits, mangos, melons, nectarines, papayas, peaches, pears, plums and tomatoes.

Ethylene gas responders: most of the ethylene producers, as well as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrot, cucumber, cauliflower, eggplant, green beans, leafy greens (such as kale), lettuce, potatoes, peas, spinach, sweet potato and tomatoes.

Ethylene gas advantage – speed up the ripening process! (Ripen hard avocados by placing in a paper bag with a banana.) Overly ripe bananas are great for making banana bread or frozen in smoothies or ice-cream.

Food Labelling

The food supplier is responsible for placing a used by or best before date on food. Date marks can give a guide to how long food can be kept before food quality deteriorates or is unsafe to consume.

As stated by Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ); Foods that must be eaten before a certain time for health or safety reasons should be marked with a use by date. Foods should not be eaten after the use by date and can't legally be sold after this date because they may pose a health or safety risk. Foods that have a best before date can legally be sold after that date provided the food is fit for human consumption. You can still eat foods for a while after the best before date as they should be safe but they may have lost some quality.

Refer to FSANZ and take note of food recalls and announcements on potentially hazardous foods that may affect your dietary patterns.