



Helping you **identify**
and **manage risk**

Food Preparation in Retirement Residences

Health Canada estimates that eleven to thirteen million Canadians suffer a foodborne illness every year. Five thousand Canadians are hospitalized and up to 900 Canadians die each year as a result. Foodborne illness, commonly known as food poisoning, is caused by eating food that contains enough harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites, moulds, yeasts or their toxins, to cause illness. It is caused by unsafe food handling or by contaminated food.

In addition to the very young, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems, seniors are at the greatest risk for foodborne illness since our immune system weakens as we age. Stomach acid plays an important role in reducing the number of bacteria in our intestinal tracts (thus reducing the risk of illness) and it also decreases as we get older.

Continuing care retirement communities strive to provide their residents with a home-like setting where they can be active, independent, and feel valued and safe. Providing high quality, appetizing, and most importantly, safe meals to seniors is paramount to operating a successful retirement residence.

Preventing Foodborne Illness

Food preparation is the most important step in the process of keeping foods safe to eat. This stage carries the greatest risk for cross contamination of foods. Raw foods (i.e. meat, fish, poultry, eggs, salad greens, and vegetables) may bring potentially harmful bacteria into the food preparation area. For this reason, it is important that proper food handling procedures are implemented and stringently followed when preparing food for consumption.

The first step to keeping foods safe to eat begins when the purchased food and supplies are delivered to the retirement residence. The receiving area for the food delivery should be kept clean and free of food debris, boxes, cans, or other refuse. It is advisable to visually inspect the delivery vehicle to assess its cleanliness.

Food Preparation Guidelines

Develop and implement written procedures and protocols that kitchen staff must adhere to when preparing food for consumption. For example:

- A high standard of personal hygiene plays an important role in preventing the spread of infection through food. Ensure that employees are clean and properly dressed. Do not allow staff to handle food when they are ill or have an infection. Change smocks, aprons, or uniforms that become soiled with blood from raw meats or poultry.
- Hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of foodborne illness. It is recommended that staff wash their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water before and after handling food. This should be a mandatory step before and after any type of food preparation. Disposable gloves are to be worn if an employee has a bandaged cut, burn or abrasion on the hand. Gloves are to be discarded after each specific use as they can potentially harbour more bacteria than if an employee was not wearing gloves.
- Start with cleaned and sanitized utensils, equipment, sinks, and work surfaces. Adopt the 3-sink dishwashing method;
 - 1 **Wash** utensils and equipment in a detergent and water solution at a temperature of 45 °C

To prevent cross contamination, ready-to-eat and raw foods should not be delivered in the same vehicle.

Food supplies should be in excellent condition before they are put into storage. Upon arrival, they should be fully and carefully examined for contamination (including insect and rodent), damage, infestation, signs of spoilage and temperature. Once examined, perishable items such as milk, eggs, butter, meat, fish, poultry, fresh fruit and vegetables must be stored immediately in the refrigerator or freezer. Whenever possible, fresh vegetables should be stored separately from dairy products and raw foods. Non-perishable items should be put away as soon as possible and never stored directly on the floor.

- 2 **Rinse** in clean water at a temperature of 45 °C
- 3 **Sanitize** in a chemical solution of 2 ml of bleach (chlorine) per one litre of water at a temperature over 77 °C for 2 minutes or simply in hot water at the same temperature and time. Leave the utensils and equipment to air dry, or dry with a clean towel.

Where spray type machines are used, they should be designed, constructed, and maintained to produce cleaning and sanitizing results required by public health acts food regulations.

- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly to remove microorganisms, dirt and pesticides.
- Handle potentially hazardous foods quickly during preparation. Work with small amounts of food, do the necessary preparation and then return the food to cooler, cook it or serve it. The longer perishable foods are left at room temperatures, the greater the potential for bacteria growth.
- Chill salad and sandwich ingredients prior to assembly. Refrigerate prepared items quickly, in shallow layers, to speed cooling.
- Prepare small quantities of breading or batter mixtures, and use them up quickly. Refrigerate leftovers immediately after use.

- Use a clean single-service utensil each time when tasting prepared foods, then immediately dispose of it to prevent accidental re-use.
- Ensure that hot foods are kept hot and that cold foods are kept cold. Keep the temperature of ready-to-serve food above 60 °C or below 4 °C until it is served. Appropriate temperatures must be maintained for the type of food being prepared, cooked and served. Unless these temperatures are maintained, bacteria will multiply and a danger of food poisoning will occur. Use a food thermometer to check the inside temperature of the food to confirm it is cooked to a sufficient temperature and safe to eat. Temperature guidelines for various food products can be obtained from your provincial or regional health department.
- Contact of ready-to-eat foods with bare hands should be kept at an absolute minimum and utensils used whenever possible.
- Prevent cross contamination of food by not allowing ready to eat foods to come into contact with work surfaces, equipment, utensils or hands that have been in contact with raw foods. It is preferable to use separate cutting boards and chopping blocks for raw and prepared foods.
- Clean and sanitize the cooking area when there is a process change.
- Change wiping and cleaning cloths that have been used in raw food preparation areas immediately after use.
- Implement a checklist of required safe food handling procedures that are to be signed off by the supervisor and/or appropriate staff member. Maintain the checklist for record purposes.

Conclusion


Education and knowledge are the best tools for preventing foodborne illness. Strive to have all the kitchen staff in your retirement centre certified in food handling and preparation. While this may not always be achievable, each province regulates how many and who must be food certified based upon the

type of facility and the number of employees working in the kitchen. This course is normally offered through your regional or provincial health board. Investigate other additional courses on safe food preparation that would benefit both the employee and retirement residence.

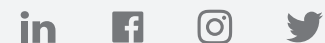
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