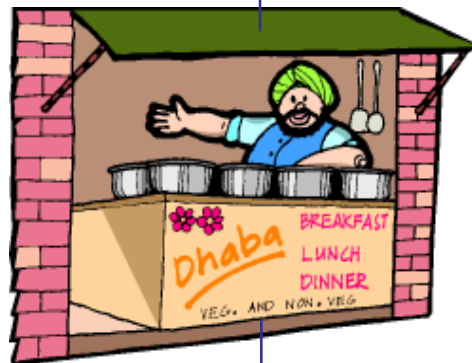


PREVENTING FOOD-BORNE ILLNESS FROM FARM TO PLATE HIGHLIGHTS OF BEST PRACTICE Food Safety and Retailing

All participants in the food chain are anxious to ensure the quality and safety of the food they produce and sell. Their reputations depend on it and ultimately their reputation or 'brand image' are the most valuable assets they have.

Hence, most modern food producers and retailers encourage consumers to provide feedback on possible defects in their products. Increasingly, the largest of these companies are also establishing dedicated telephone care lines and mail systems to listen to consumer concerns and views and to answer questions relating to the safety and quality of food products.

Rapid feedback from consumers enables problems to be remedied immediately and could assist in the elimination of potentially serious threats to safety.



Possible Food Safety Hazards at Point of Purchase and What Consumers Can Do About It

- The look, feel and smell of fresh produce is often a good measure of its quality and safety.
- Damaged or distorted packaging, e.g. bulging pots, dented cans, may be a warning that a product may be spoiled or, at the least, that its shelf life may have been reduced. It should be reported to the retailer, and the products returned for replacement or refund.
- "Best before" and "use-by" dates should be taken seriously; out-of-date products should not be purchased and should be reported to store managers.
- If packaged food is found to have gone "off" before the "best before" date on the package, the product should be returned or reported to the retailer or food processor.
- Adulteration of food involves using inferior, cheaper ingredients to cheat consumers and undercut competition. Many laws exist in different countries to ban the sale of food that has been adulterated or found unsafe for human consumption. Hence, the sale of misbranded, mislabelled, and contaminated food should be reported to relevant authorities. Reporting incidents can help authorities challenge errant retailers and reduce the recurrence of these incidents.

Eating Outside the Home: Identifying Risks can Eliminate Food-borne Disease

Consumers should pay special attention to the preparation of meals outside the home – street vendors, restaurants,

hospitals, nursing homes, child care establishments, schools, canteens, aeroplanes, wedding parties, business conventions, etc. Considering the vast number of meals consumed in such public settings, professional chefs and caterers do an outstanding job of protecting the public against food-borne disease. However, while the incidence of problems in public places is very low, when something does go wrong, it tends to attract wide public attention and usually affects a large number of people. Such incidents are commonly investigated by an official inquiry; in contrast, individual incidents of disease in the home are rarely reported at all.

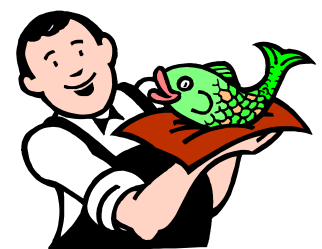
■ If food in a restaurant or other public place smells, looks or tastes odd, it should be returned.

■ Particular care needs to be taken about food prepared in large quantities, in advance or under difficult conditions - at symposia, meetings, large social events, outdoor events, etc.

There are many technological initiatives which can raise food safety standards of caterers. Examples include

improvements in water storage and dispensing equipment, more efficient pest control measure and waste disposal arrangements, innovative designing of food stalls, push carts, etc.

Efforts are being made to inform and educate professional food-handlers as well as the consumer about how to avoid food-borne illnesses. Strict industrial hygiene procedures such as Hazard and Critical Control Point Procedure (HACCP) (see Food Processing section), used to ensure safety in food processing plants have also been adopted.



Some special procedures that should be followed in public settings are:

- Where a large number of meals are prepared in advance and/or far from the point of eventual consumption - schools or hospitals or nursing homes or on trains and aeroplanes - facilities for maintaining hot food hot, and cold food cold must be in place, to prevent the rapid growth of bacteria in the foods.



• When large groups of people are served meals prepared in facilities that are not designed for such quantities, catering personnel should be particularly careful to avoid contamination, by scrupulously following good hygiene practices, and paying particular attention to foods such as salads, which are intended to be eaten raw.

- At public events where food should look attractive as well as taste good, food service professionals face additional challenges. Raw decorations (parsley, shrimps, etc.) pose a risk, and the decorative arranging of food can result in food being handled more than is usual to acquire the desired effect. As a consequence, undesirable micro-organisms may enter an otherwise safe food dish.
- A consumer who suffers from food allergies should be particularly cautious in public places, even avoiding certain foods unless assured that there is no risk of contamination.
- Lastly, while the food processing industry produces a



relatively limited number of products using relatively standardised methods, food service establishments change recipes daily and often prepare several different dishes at the same time and in the same facility. Under these circumstances,

professional food-handlers should take extra precautions to avoid cross-contamination between raw materials or between raw food and finished products.

Street Food

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines street foods as foods and beverages prepared and/or sold by vendors in streets and other public places for immediate consumption or at a later time without further processing or preparation. With a large proportion of urban dwellers relying heavily on street foods to obtain meals on a daily basis, the street food trade in many cities in Asia, has grown considerably.

Many urban residents obtain a significant portion of their diet from street foods, since prepared meals and snacks are sold cheaply on the street. Street foods are especially useful for the poor, who lack time and facilities to cook, but office workers and other sectors of society also rely on them. Heavy reliance on street food consumption, the perishable nature of the products being



vended, and several direct associations of street food with food-borne outbreaks and epidemics, make adequate control of street food trade imperative for protecting public health.

The challenges to ensure that safe food is offered for sale include - large number of mobile vendors, limited education of many vendors, poor knowledge about good practices in food hygiene and the crude conditions under which vendors operate.

The challenges to ensure that safe food is offered for sale include - large number of mobile vendors, limited education of many vendors, poor knowledge about good practices in food hygiene and the crude conditions under which vendors operate.

Interventions by WHO, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and many national educational institutions and public health

authorities have targeted food hygiene issues of street foods. Many authorities have developed a Code of Hygiene Practice specifically for street vended foods as the basis for education and training, as well as control and monitoring. Such intervention and training in food hygiene initiatives have led to some improvement in food handling practices. Interventions have also focused on advice on regulation of the street food sector, training on methods of inspection of street foods, raising awareness among senior municipal officials and development and dissemination of 'appropriate technologies' for use in the street food sector. However, there is general recognition that such initiatives need to be sustained and continuously monitored to ensure and expand their effectiveness.



The consumer must employ special care when purchasing food from street vendors. Following is a checklist of precautions to consider when consuming food from street traders.

- only eating cooked food while it is still hot.
- refusing food which has been left standing for a long time.
- avoiding food which should be cold, but which is in fact lukewarm.
- avoiding food that looks or smells odd.
- looking for recognised certificates of good hygiene in public places.

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