

Safe Handling and Cooking of High Risk Food

The last 12 months have been particularly challenging and we have seen a number of outbreaks of food borne illness both within Oldham and nationally that may be of interest to, and require further consideration for, food businesses.

Campylobacter

We have seen a number of food poisoning outbreaks associated with the consumption of paté. In 2011 in the UK, there have been 18 reported outbreaks of Campylobacter affecting 443 individuals. 13 of these outbreaks have been linked to the consumption of poultry liver parfait or paté. If you have paté on your menu, especially over the Christmas season, we would ask that you review your procedures to ensure that any potential food safety risks are controlled and pate is being prepared safely.

E. coli O157

Nationally there has been an outbreak of E-coli O157 associated with the consumption of vegetables, including potatoes and leeks, and these foods were implicated but not confirmed as the source of a national outbreak. The Food Standards Agency has recently issued guidance in relation to the control of E-coli O157. This guidance considers raw and cooked foods and segregation of areas, equipment, staff etc. Any complex pieces of equipment must not be used for raw and cooked food e.g. vacuum packers, slicers, large stick blenders etc. Separate equipment must also be provided and documented cleaning schedules should include the method of cleaning together with the contact time for disinfection in order for it to be effective.

Any disinfectant or sanitiser must meet the standards BSEN 1276:1997, BSEN 13697:200. If you are unsure you must check with your supplier to ensure it meets these standards. If cleaning and disinfection is by means of a sanitiser only then single use is not sufficient to ensure effective disinfection. The sanitiser should be used to clean and then again to disinfect. Dishwashers used for washing equipment (commercial dishwashers) must reach a temperature of 82°C to ensure effective disinfection and that equipment is dry prior to storage.

A clean area must also be provided for the handling and storage of ready to eat foods. This is an area within your food establishment that is specifically used to ensure that harmful bacteria including E coli O157 has been effectively excluded from all surfaces, including hands, which will come into contact with ready to eat foods.

The guidance also gives information on hand washing and advocates the use of paper to turn taps off to control the risk of cross contamination after handling raw foods

Listeria monocytogenes

Listeria monocytogenes is also on the increase and emerging as a real food safety risk in ready to eat foods such as cooked meats, sandwiches and chopped fruit. L. monocytogenes causes more deaths each year than Salmonella and E.coli O157 combined. The number of cases nationally is increasing, predominantly involving the over 60's with underlying medical conditions. Vulnerable people, for example patients who are immuno-suppressed either due to their medical condition or medication are particularly susceptible to infection, as are pregnant women.

We recommend that you also consider the risk of Listeria and implement control measures as part of your food safety management system. Listeria can grow at temperatures of less than 3°C hence effective control measures should ensure that refrigerators are working correctly (ideally less than 5°C), that cooked meat is used within 48 hours of opening and reputable suppliers are used for the purchase of all high-risk foods including cooked meats.

Other Areas

You should also consider any special care and specialist items on your menu such as Carpaccio, oysters and lightly cooked foods etc. and ensure that food safety risks have been identified and adequately controlled. Any foods such as hollandaise sauce, home-made ice-cream and carbonara sauces should be made with pasteurised liquid egg and not raw shell eggs. Where water baths are used to cook foods such as terrines or scrambled egg it is important that the temperature of the water bath is hot enough to ensure that the food reaches a centre temperature of a minimum 75°C at the end of cooking (liquid dishes must be regularly stirred to avoid cold spots).

Where shell eggs are used and pooled together they should be refrigerated if not required immediately and used within 24 hours. Whisking of raw shell eggs can form aerosols and therefore shell eggs should be whisked in an area away from ready to eat foods and thorough hand washing, cleaning and disinfection of all equipment and surfaces must take place after use.

Further guidance on the above issues is available at the following links: -

<http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2011/dec/campypate>

<http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/guidancenotes/hygguid/ecoliguide>

<http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2008/jul/listeriosisfacts>