

FLU ADVICE

For Food Handlers

If a food handler or his family have the flu, should he be allowed to work?

One of the best ways to slow and stop the spread of flu is to keep sick people away from well people. Workers with flu-like symptoms (fever, runny or stuffy nose, cough, sore throat, headache or muscle aches, vomiting and diarrhea) should stay home and not come to work until at least 24 hours after their fever has gone away without the help of fever-reducing medication.

Food workers who are well, but who have a sick family member, can go to work as usual, but they should take everyday precautions, including washing their hands often with soap and water, especially after they cough or sneeze, monitor their health and notify their supervisor if they begin to feel sick.

Federal regulations require that any person who is sick and has a reasonable risk of contaminating food, food-contact surfaces, or food-packaging materials must be excluded from operations that might allow such contamination until the health condition is resolved. These regulations are contained in the Current Good Manufacturing Practice in Manufacturing, Packing, or Holding Human Food, in Part 110.10 of Title 21 of the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations: http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_08/21cfr110_08.html.

The FDA Food Code also stipulates that employees experiencing persistent sneezing, coughing or a runny nose that causes discharge from the eyes, nose or mouth may not work with exposed food, clean equipment, utensils, linens, or unwrapped single-service or single-use articles.

If someone in the facility gets sick, is special cleaning needed?

No. Routine cleaning and disinfecting will kill flu viruses. Flu viruses can survive on cloth, paper and tissues for up to 12 hours and on hard, non-porous surfaces like stainless steel and plastic up to 48 hours. Viruses left on a stainless steel surface and picked up by a person within 8 hours can lead to infection. Surfaces and items with frequent hand contact should be cleaned regularly.

Surfaces and items with frequent customer hand contact may include door handles, handrails, tables, chairs, booths, menus, bill folders, highchairs, booster seats, bar area surfaces, restrooms, trash cans. Surfaces or items with frequent employee hand contact may also include dispenser or equipment handles, service trays, office equipment, microphone, cash register, ice scoops, refrigerator and freezer handles, telephone, light switches, thermostats, lockers and cleaning supplies.

Use an EPA-registered disinfectant effective against influenza A viruses and follow these cleaning tips:

- Carefully read and follow directions on the product label.
- Wear disposable gloves while cleaning and disinfecting.
- Discard gloves after use and wash and/or sanitize hands before and after gloving.
- Remove organic material from the surface to be disinfected and follow normal cleaning procedures.
- Rinse off detergents to avoid diluting or inactivating the disinfectant.
- Follow disinfection of food contact surfaces with a potable water rinse and then a hard surface EPA-registered sanitizer according to label directions.

Could a sick employee pass the flu to a customer?

Influenza viruses are spread from person-to-person on respiratory droplets, when a person who is sick coughs or sneezes and someone else breathes it in. It can also be spread when viruses are picked up off surfaces and then enter the body through the mouth, nose or eyes.

Do food handlers need to change cooking procedures to lower the risk of spreading flu?

No. Human influenza viruses are not spread by food, whether it is raw or cooked. Foods should be cooked using standard food preparation guidelines.

Do food handlers need to wear facemasks to protect themselves from flu?

No, food handlers do not need to wear facemasks. Facemasks are only recommended for healthcare workers at high risk of exposure to H1N1.