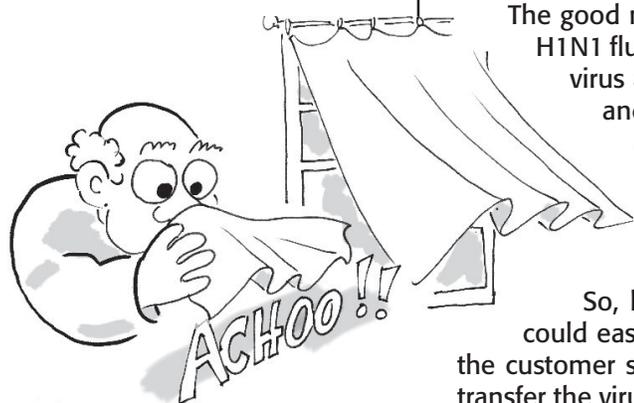


FOOD TALK



SANITATION TIPS FOR FOOD WORKERS

FALL 2009



H1N1 Influenza: What You Need to Know

The good news is that it's not possible to become infected with the 2009 H1N1 flu virus by preparing or eating pork. The experts called it "swine flu" virus at first, until they found out that it has as much to do with birds and humans as with pigs. But whatever they call it, the challenge for a food establishment is to prevent infection from one person to another or from contaminated surfaces.

The H1N1 virus can survive for up to 48 hours on stainless steel and plastic surfaces, according to Bruce Cords, vice president of environment, food safety and public health at Ecolab.

So, let's say a customer sneezes while sitting at a table. The virus could easily be transferred to the table or to condiment containers. Or, if the customer sneezes into her hands and later visits the restroom, she could transfer the virus to the restroom door handle. When other customers rest their hands on the table, or use the condiments, or visit the restroom, they may become infected. Get the idea?

Restaurants need to identify the most important "touch points," both in the dining area and in the kitchen, according to Cords. When they find the most vulnerable spots, they can increase the cleaning and sanitizing in those locations, he said, in a Sept. 16 webinar hosted by the National Restaurant Association (see www.restaurant.org/webinars). Cords called for hourly disinfection of touch points during periods when the restaurant is heavily used. These could include door knobs, toilet flush levers and light switches. It is also a good idea to supply alcohol-based hand sanitizer in the dining room, he said. Customers appreciate this and are not scared away, as some restaurant owners believe. Just outside the restroom door is a good place for a hand sanitizing station.

One useful restroom technique is to use a paper towel to turn off the faucet after you have washed your hands. This stops the virus from getting onto your clean hand if you use your hand to turn off the faucet.

When to Stay Home

Most people become infected when others around them cough or sneeze. So employees should stay home if they have the flu and should wait 24 hours after a fever ends before returning to work. This advice may change as the pandemic continues, so keep in touch with your local health department for updates. The researchers at the Centers for Disease Control believe that anyone infected with 2009 H1N1 flu may be able to infect others from one day before getting sick to up to seven days after they get sick. This is why it is a major challenge to stop this flu from spreading.

The National Restaurant Association is urging employers to be flexible and not punish employees who stay home while sick with the flu. They can expect workers to be out for three to five days. Establishments should carefully listen to the information from state and local health officials on prevention

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and response strategies, and should communicate their plans to employees, the association says.

Symptoms of the 2009 H1N1 flu virus include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. In some cases, the illness includes diarrhea and vomiting. Individuals who are pregnant, or have diabetes, heart disease, asthma or kidney disease are at higher risk.

The Food and Drug Administration approved a vaccine against the H1N1 virus on September 15. But supplies may not be available for many weeks. It would be a good idea to get vaccinated whenever that becomes possible.

Another good idea is to cross-train staff in critical areas in case key employees become sick. Depending on the severity of the outbreak, restaurants could consider closing public gathering areas such as condiment dispensers and buffets. In an extreme situation, they might decide to stop serving in the dining room and only supply take-out.



Employee Checklist: Plan for a Pandemic

Here is a quick checklist to see if your establishment is ready to deal with a pandemic:

Task	Done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for employee absences during a pandemic due to factors such as personal illness, family member illness, and quarantines. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make plans for staff backup to allow for absenteeism, and cross-train employees to fill essential vacancies. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage annual seasonal flu vaccination. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If pandemic flu vaccine is available, encourage vaccination. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the need for antiviral medications and plan for access, consistent with local laws and regulations. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine if medical services and/or medications will be available for employees during a pandemic, and consider planning for evacuation or relocation, if needed, once a pandemic begins. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind employees that normal supply lines may be slow or out of action and that they should make personal preparations for pandemic flu (e.g., stockpiling food, water, and prescription drugs). 	<input type="checkbox"/>

(Sources for this issue include: the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Restaurant Association, Ecolab.)

Time to Check those Thermometers!

Did you know that thermometers need to be checked regularly to make sure they are giving the correct temperature? A thermometer is a basic tool for food safety, so you need to know how to do this. It's called calibration. There are two standard ways—using slushy ice or boiling water. A bimetallic thermometer needs to be recalibrated regularly, especially after being dropped or exposed to extreme temperatures. Look for an adjustable nut under the dial face.

For the ice method, place the temperature probe at least two inches into a glass of finely crushed ice. Add cold tap water to remove air pockets. Wait at least 30 seconds. The gauge should read 32° F/0° C. If not, adjust it. For a digital thermometer, just press the reset button to automatically calibrate the thermometer.

In the boiling water method, put the probe in boiling water.

For bimetallics, wait until the needle stops moving, then adjust the calibration nut to 212° F/100° C. If you are high above sea level, the boiling point will be lower, so check with your local health department for the boiling point of water in your location. To calibrate a digital thermometer, just press the reset button.

A thermistor or thermocouple thermometer might need a new battery or might have to be repaired by the manufacturer if it gives incorrect temperatures.

Sanitize

It's very important for thermometers to be sanitized between uses, especially when the same probes are used on both raw and ready-to-eat foods. You can clean and sanitize a thermometer by wiping off any food particles, then placing the probe in a sanitizing solution for at least five seconds and, finally, by air drying. If probes are used just on raw or just on cooked foods, the stem of the thermometer can be wiped with an antiseptic towelette or alcohol swab between uses.

There are many different types of thermometers, including:

Bimetallic Thermometers These are the most common thermometers. They are made of two different

metals that expand when heated and give an accurate temperature when they are correctly calibrated. The sensor is two inches or more from the tip, so these are not good for use with thin foods like hamburger patties.

Thermistor Digital Thermometers These contain ceramic in the tip that registers resistance as the temperature changes. The digital thermometer shows this resistance as a temperature. These thermometers can measure temperatures of thin foods, but can't be used in an oven while food is cooking.

Thermocouples Two different metals are joined in these thermometers. They produce electric charges as the temperature changes. The results are displayed digitally. The expensive models allow storage of the data, which can be downloaded onto a computer. A wide range of thin thermocouple probes are available. They can accurately measure temperatures of small and thin foods.

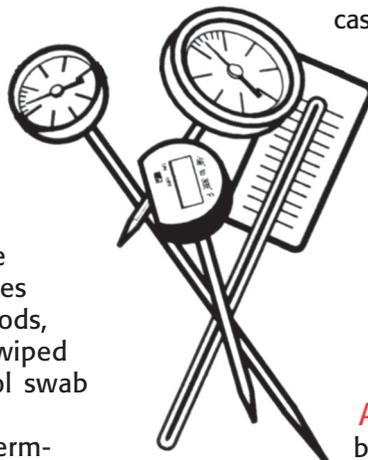
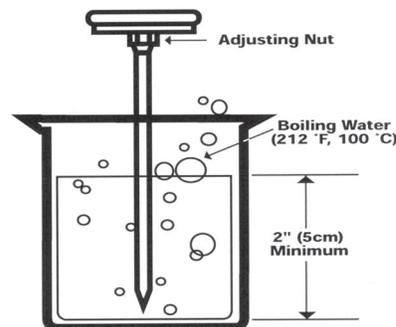
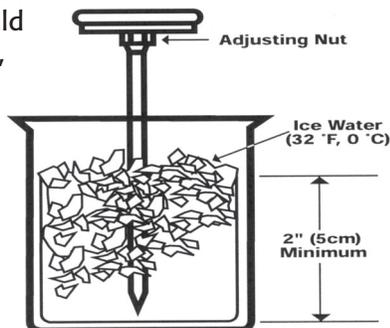
Infrared Thermometers

Used like a flashlight, these hand-held guns use a laser beam. The gun detects the amount of energy given off by an object and displays the temperature digitally. These units don't actually contact the food, so they don't need to be cleaned after each

use. They can be used to monitor temperatures of display cases, delivery trucks, salad bars and other foods.

T-Stick Disposable Sensors These single-use, cardboard thermometers measure a preset temperature. When the desired temperature is reached, the wax on the tip melts and the color changes. T-Stick 160 can be used on hamburgers, fish, pork or eggs, or dishwasher rinse water. T-Stick 140 is for testing hot foods. T-Stick 170 is used on poultry.

Appliance Thermometers These are usually bimetallic coil thermometers and are used in refrigerators, freezers and stoves.



Test Your Food Safety Knowledge!

If you studied this **Food Talk** issue carefully, you will know the answers to the following questions:

1) How long can the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus survive on stainless steel and plastic surfaces?

- a) Eight hours.
- b) Ten hours.
- c) Up to 48 hours.
- d) Five minutes.

2) After washing your hands, it is a good idea to turn off the faucet by using:

- a) A clean hand.
- b) An elbow.
- c) A glove.
- d) A paper towel.

3) How long, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, should sick employees stay home after their H1N1 flu fever is gone?

- a) 24 hours.
- b) 48 hours.

- c) A week.
- d) None of the above.

4) What temperature should you see on a properly calibrated thermometer placed in ice water?

- a) 41° F/5° C.
- b) 32° F/0° C.
- c) 0° F /-18° C.
- d) None of the above

5) If your establishment is at sea level, what temperature should you see on a properly calibrated thermometer placed in boiling water?

- a) 212° F/100° C.
- b) 100° F/38° C.
- c) 165° F/74° C.
- d) None of the above.

Answers: 1. c; 2 d; 3. a.; 4. b; 5. a.

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