FOOD HANDLING: CROSS CONTAMINATION

INTRODUCTION

Cross contamination is the means of transferring biological, chemical, or physical contaminants to food products. These contaminants can be transferred by hands, clothing, equipment, packaging materials, or even when foods such as beef and poultry come into contact. To prevent cross contamination, you must take care to exercise all safe work practices.

HAZARDS

The dangers of cross contamination can be difficult or impossible to see immediately, but the effects are very real. Neglecting to use clean work methods even once can cause many people to become sick. The three main methods of contamination are:

- Biological: Bacteria, parasites, viruses, fungi or allergens. These contaminants can cause a person to become violently ill or worse. There is no way to see biological contaminants, such as campylobacter on raw beef or salmonella on raw poultry, so you must always use food safe work practices to avoid cross contamination.
- Chemical: Pesticides, food additives, cleaning supplies, or other toxic materials. These contaminants can also cause a person to become ill, as well as result in reproductive harm or other diseases depending on what kind of chemical is ingested.
- Physical: Dirt, hair, band aids, metal staples, etc. The real problem with physical contaminants is that they are often indicators of other sources of contamination. If the contaminant is a hard metal or plastic, however, it could also cause damage while chewing.

CLEAN ATTIRE

The most common vehicle for transferring impurities are food workers themselves. Protective clothing helps to prevent this by acting as a physical barrier between the food product and possible contaminants.

- Slip resistant, close-toed shoes are required.
- Jewelry should be removed and fingernails should be kept short and clean
- A clean hat or hairnet is required
- Food aprons or gowns are required
- Disposable gloves and frequent hand washing must be implemented
- Remove all contaminated personal protective equipment when leaving food preparation areas or when starting to work on a different type of food – for example, switching from beef to poultry.

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CLEAN WORK PRACTICES

Even with all of the appropriate clothing, you will still contaminate food if you are not careful. For example, gloves will be useless if you sneeze into them! The following practices WILL cause cross contamination:

- Scratching the scalp or any part of the body
- Running fingers through hair
- Wiping or touching the nose
- Touching an open sore or pimple
- Wearing a dirty uniform
- Coughing or sneezing into the hand
- Leaning over food while working
- Storing beef products directly next to poultry products
- Setting food on the ground for temporary storage
- Neglecting to maintain proper hygiene

CONCLUSION

Many illnesses are transmitted through food, so it is very important to pay attention while you work in order to maintain quality. Along with the above guidelines, utilizing all previous training given to you by your employer will greatly reduce the chances of cross contamination.