

Delaware Celebrates Food Safety Education Week September 24-29. When Cooking: Be Safe, Don't Cross-contaminate.

In Delaware, there are over 2,000 restaurants in the state that prepare and serve food to the public. The Delaware Division of Public Health's (DPH) Office of Food Protection assures through inspections that the food is being handled properly from preparation through serving meeting high standards.

Traditionally, the National Restaurant Association highlights the importance of food safety throughout the month of September. National Food Safety Month was created in 1994 to heighten the awareness about the importance of food safety education. Food safety is much broader than just washing your hands during food preparation. It is actually a science that requires the proper handling, preparation and storage of food to prevent foodborne illness. It is regulated by federal, state and local laws.

New National Restaurant Association research shows that the majority of consumers find food safety important both at restaurants and at home. According to an August 2012 survey of 1,015 American adults, 96 percent say it is important to them to know that the restaurants they visit train employees in food safety. In addition, more than eight out of 10 (81 percent) say they would be more likely to visit a restaurant that trains all its employees in proper food safety practices.

"In Delaware, we are fortunate we have dedicated people in the

food services industry who ensure foods being served are safe and enjoyable,” said Governor Jack Markell. “It takes people working in food establishments and in health, education and safety to protect and promote our well being.”

DPH works to ensure food safety through inspections, regulation and investigating consumer complaints. DPH’s Community Environmental Health Services inspects approximately 3,500 food service establishments a year. And, the Office of Food Protection implemented a centralized complaints system 18 months ago as a way to better process, triage and track complaints on food establishments.

“Our goal is to ensure effective compliance and enforcement procedures for food establishments,” said Dr. Karyl Rattay, DPH director. “Food safety education and safe food practices are the strongest tools for protecting consumers against foodborne illness.”

When it comes to cooking at home, virtually all consumers say they have at least basic knowledge of food safety. According to the National Restaurant Association, 63 percent of the consumers say they are aware of proper food safety practices and always follow them, while 33 percent say they are familiar with some food safety practices and follow those when they can.

Be safe, don’t cross contaminate! Cross-contamination is the transfer of harmful bacteria to food from other foods, cutting boards, utensils, etc., if they are not handled properly. This is especially true when handling raw meat, poultry, and seafood, so keep these foods and their juices away from already cooked or ready-to-eat foods and fresh produce. When handling foods, it is important to keep foods apart. By following some simple steps, you can prevent cross-contamination and reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

When preparing food is important to observe the following:

- Wash hands, cutting boards, utensils, and counter tops with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before and after handling food, and after using the bathroom, changing diapers; or handling pets.
- Separate raw meat, poultry, and seafood from other foods by placing them in separate in containers to prevent their juices from dripping onto other foods.
- Store eggs in their original carton and refrigerate as soon as possible.
- Always use a clean cutting board. Replace them once it becomes excessively worn or develop hard-to-clean grooves.
- Sauce that is used to marinate raw meat, poultry, or seafood should not be used on cooked foods, unless it is boiled just before using.
- Always use a clean plate. Never place cooked food back on the same plate or cutting board that previously held raw food.
- Refrigerate or freeze leftovers within 2 hours or sooner in clean, shallow, covered containers to prevent harmful bacteria from multiplying.

Consumers are advised to always use soap and warm water to wash hands, and to thoroughly clean and sanitize the sink, cutting boards, utensils and anything else that comes in contact with raw turkey and its juices. Start with soap and hot water (at least 110 degrees F), scrubbing to remove food debris and oils before rinsing. Then sanitize with a mixture of one teaspoon bleach to one gallon of water.

“The Food Safety Education Week allows us to highlight those in the foodservice industry who go above and beyond to ensure that their food handling practices are superior,” said Carrie Leishman, president of the Delaware Restaurant Association. “We recognize that responsible food safety is a year-round commitment and elevating those that do it well shows all Delawareans and those who travel to Delaware that our

restaurants are safe and open for business.”

Delaware Food Safety Awardees will be announced at a special event this fall. For further information on food safety visit: <http://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsp/foodsafety.html>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations.