



IPC Topic: Food Safety for Frontline Staff

Intro: Every year, an estimated 1 in 6 Americans (or 48 million people) get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die from food-borne infections (also called food-borne disease or food poisoning). Germs can live on all types of surfaces and equipment. Proper cleaning and disinfection can help keep ourselves and our clients healthy and safe. Keeping our hands clean using soap and water with food services is important.

What is the risk? Know where germs live to stop their spread and protect clients and yourself from food-borne illness. Germs in the nose and mouth can be spread to the skin and hands when people touch their faces, which can then spread to surfaces or other people. Food safety practices focus on cleaning your hands, keeping food hot or cold, and recognizing who is at risk.

Highlights:

- Recognize who is at higher risk for food-borne illnesses:
 - People 65 and older
 - People with a weakened immune system
 - Pregnant women
 - Children under 5
- Food safety practices are for all staff not just dietary staff. Ensure all employees follow these guidelines:
 - Staff need to properly wash hands with soap and water to prevent cross contamination (i.e., between handling raw meat and other foods).
 - Wash hands before assisting clients with eating and after they are done.
 - Staff need to practice hygiene (e.g., not touch hair, face, nose, etc.) and then handle food).
 - Alcohol-based sanitizer is not recommended while handling food or preparing food.
 - Staff who serve food to clients after collecting soiled plates and food waste need to perform proper hand washing.
 - Discard nourishments and snacks that are held at room temperature and not served within 4 hours of delivery.
 - When using single serving items, they should be dedicated to one client or separate serving spoon/fork should be used and then food item be discarded after serving due to increased risk of bacterial growth.
- What other questions can we ask?

- Are snack/nourishment refrigerators on the unit maintained to prevent the potential for food-borne illness?
 - According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), a safe recommended refrigerator temperature is at or below 40° F (4° C) to prevent germs and bacteria from growing.²
 - Remember to keep “cold foods cold and hot foods hot.”
 - Cold foods can be kept cold by refrigeration or ice baths.
 - Hot foods can be in warming trays or steam tables.
- Are food items dated/labeled?
 - Be aware of “best if used by dates”
- Are foods/items covered to and from transport to clients?

Summary: Food-borne germs like to hide in unsafe food conditions, and unclean hands. Safe food practices apply not only to dietary trained staff members but all staff and visitors. Recognizing the risks, cleaning your hands and being aware of best practices for food safety will prevent the spread of germs and food-borne illnesses.

For more information on recognizing risk in therapy departments and related Project Firstline materials, see References below:

1. <https://www.foodsafety.gov/>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety>
3. <https://www.fda.gov/food/buy-store-serve-safe-food/refrigerator-thermometers-cold-facts-about-food-safety>
4. https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/Downloads/som107ap_pp_guidelines_ltcf.pdf
5. <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety>
6. <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/cms-20055kitchenpdf>
7. <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/pdf/projectfirstline/Healthcare-Germs-Body-Skin-508.pdf>
8. <https://www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/index.html>
9. <https://www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/campaign/index.html>
10. <https://www.cdc.gov/hai/pdfs/HowToReadALabel-Infographic-508.pdf>