

# Employee Illness Standard for Food Establishments

## WHY...WHAT IS THE RISK?

If employees come to work while they are ill with symptoms consistent with an enteric infection such as ***vomiting, diarrhea or jaundice (i.e yellowing of the eyes or skin)***, the foods they touch are likely to become contaminated with the pathogen that may be causing their illness. Consequently, customers who eat this food may also become sick.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates approximately 20% of **FOODBORNE ILLNESS** outbreaks in restaurants are caused by ill food handlers. In Capital Health, the estimate is closer to 40% based on data collected between 2003 and 2007. The purpose of this standard is to make both food handlers in food establishments and operators of food establishments aware that they can help reduce the likelihood of food-borne illness by meeting the following criteria:

- Employees of the food establishment shall not report to work if they are ill with ***vomiting, diarrhea or jaundice***.
- The person in charge of the food establishment shall not schedule an employee to work if he or she is aware that the employee is ill with ***vomiting, diarrhea or jaundice***.
- The person in charge of the food establishment shall require any employee on duty who is ill with ***vomiting, diarrhea or jaundice*** to leave the premises immediately and report for duty only when the symptoms have disappeared.
- The person in charge may choose to restrict a food handler from food handling if the employee has:
  - ◆ cold symptoms (coughing, sneezing, fever, runny nose).
  - ◆ Any skin lesion, wound, rash, or boil on the hands, wrists, exposed portions of the arms, or on any other exposed part of the body.
  - ◆ Any other illness that may negatively impact on food handling or customer service duties.

## **DEFINITIONS:**

**OPERATOR:** Means the person who manages or directs the handling of food in a food establishment and includes an owner or the person in care and control as defined in the Food Regulation.

**EXCLUDE:** To keep an infectious food handler out of a food establishment until he or she is no longer ill. In cases where an individual is excluded by Order of the Medical Officer of Health (MOH), Capital Health will notify both the employee and the employer prior to the person returning to work.

**RESTRICT:** To limit an ill employee's work duties i.e. employee cannot work with food, food equipment, or single service items.

**FOOD HANDLER:** means an individual who handles food, utensils or equipment.

**FOOD HANDLING AREA:** means the area in a food establishment where food is handled and includes all equipment and utensils in the area.

**HANDLE:** means, in relation to food, the supply, sale, offering for sale, processing, preparation, packaging, providing, display, service, dispensing, storage or transportation of any food that is intended for public consumption.

**FOODBORNE ILLNESS (food poisoning):** Sickness caused by viruses, bacteria or toxins in food.

## **COMMON FOODBORNE ILLNESS SYMPTOMS:**

- Diarrhea<sup>(1)\*</sup>
- Vomiting<sup>(2)\*</sup>
- Abdominal Cramps<sup>(2)</sup>
- Nausea<sup>(2)</sup>
- Fever
- Jaundice\*\* (yellowing of the skin or eyes)

**(1) other than that associated with medical conditions such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Crohn's Disease, ulcerative colitis, etc.**

**(2) in the absence of other obvious causes, such as morning sickness, excessive alcohol consumption, sun stroke, menstruation, etc.**

\* denotes symptoms where an employee must be EXCLUDED

\*\* denotes symptoms where an employee must be EXCLUDED and should consult a physician *immediately*.

## KEY MESSAGES FOR FOOD HANDLERS:

- Many foodborne illnesses may be passed from an ill food handler to others through food handling activities.
- A food employee must inform the person in charge if they are experiencing symptoms of **vomiting**, **diarrhea**, or **jaundice** .
- Operators must **EXCLUDE** employees who experience onset of **vomiting**, **diarrhea**, or **jaundice** or have been diagnosed with an illness that can be transmitted through food.
- When an employee is **EXCLUDED**, they cannot be present in the food establishment.
- When an employee is **RESTRICTED**, they may perform work duties other than handling exposed food, food equipment, utensils and single service items.
- An employee with an open and draining wound, sore, or rash must be restricted from food handling if the wound is improperly protected.

## EXCLUSIONS:

| <b>EXCLUSIONS</b>                                    |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Signs &amp; Symptoms</b>                          | <b>Management Responsibilities</b>  | <b>When An Employee Can Return To Work</b>             |
| <b>Vomiting</b>                                      | Exclude worker  | Until symptoms stop*                                   |
| <b>Diarrhea</b>                                      | Exclude worker  | Until symptoms stop*                                   |
| <b>Jaundice</b> ( <i>yellowing of eyes or skin</i> ) | Exclude the worker and advise them to consult a physician.<br><br>Immediately contact Capital Health (780-408-LINK) | Only after consultation and approval by Capital Health |

\*Note: Food workers are at highest risk of contaminating food while they are ill with vomiting or diarrhea. However, best practice is to exclude workers until 48 hours after the last episode of vomiting or diarrhea. Food workers who prepare food for high-risk populations (e.g. in hospitals, childcare centers, and nursing homes) should follow best practice guidelines. Consult your EHO for more information.

## RESTRICTIONS:

- While operators are not *required* to exclude employees who have symptoms of ***nausea or cramping; eye, ear or throat infections; or cold symptoms (coughing, sneezing, fever, runny nose)***, they should consider doing so in order to minimize contact (and possible spread of infection) with other staff and patrons. At the very least, operators are strongly encouraged to restrict the duties of any employee who exhibits these symptoms.

- Operators of food establishments **MUST** require food handlers to cover any skin lesion, wound, rash, or boil on the hands, wrists, arms, or on any other exposed part of the body. For hands and wrists, a bandage or dressing covered by single use glove will provide the necessary protection. A dry, durable, tight-fitting bandage will often suffice for other areas of the body.
- Operators need not exclude or restrict employees with bloodborne diseases such as Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C or HIV because these illnesses are not transmitted through food. Capital Health has a printed resource which is *available online* at the address listed below.

## **LEGISLATION**

- **Alberta's Food Regulation (A.R.31/2006) stipulates:**

30(1)(f) *"A food handler must refrain from any conduct that could result in the contamination of food or a food area."*

30(2) *"A person must not work as a food handler if prohibited from working by or under the Communicable Diseases Regulation (A.R. 238/85)."*

30(3) *"The operator must ensure that subsections (1) and (2) are complied with."*

- **Alberta's Communicable Diseases Regulation (A.R.238/85) stipulates:**

5(1) *"The medical officer of health shall order that an infected person shall be excluded from occupations involving food handling... unless the medical officer of health is satisfied that the risk of transmission is acceptably low."*

5(2) *"An infected person who has diarrhea shall not engage in any occupation referred to in subsection (1) while s/he has diarrhea."*

## **OPERATOR RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Review the information in this document with all employees.
- Design and implement a staff illness log.
- Review the employee illness standard with all new staff.
- Monitor employees for signs of illness, particularly if you are aware that they have had recent contact with ill individuals or if they have recently returned from a developing country.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Visit the Capital Health website at: <http://www.capitalhealth.ca/AboutUs/OurOrganization/PublicHealthDivision/EnvironmentalHealth/EnvironmentalHealthEnforcement/default.htm>

*For more information, please contact your nearest Environmental Public Health Services office.*