



# Sanitation Pitfalls

in the Healthcare Kitchen

FOOD PROTECTION CONNECTION

Educate staff and stay focused on these five key areas to avoid the most commonly cited sanitation pitfalls

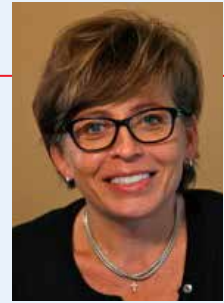
Foodservice directors in health care face a multitude of challenges every day. Providing food to a vulnerable population brings sanitation to the forefront and is an operational priority in healthcare settings. While foodservice professionals must address many sanitation issues in kitchens, if we educate staff and stay focused on the following five key areas, we can avoid the most commonly cited sanitation pitfalls.

## COMPETING PRIORITIES

The first pitfall regarding sanitation is competing priorities. It is challenging to manage staffing, patient or resident satisfaction, client expectations, inspections, regulations, and various other responsibilities. Achieving a clean

operation is a choice and helps determine the culture of the kitchen. The entire foodservice team must understand through education and training that sanitation and safety practices are a high priority in your facility.

When the expectation of cleanliness is maintained throughout all shifts, sanitation becomes standard operating procedure. As your culture shifts to one of accountability in maintaining sanitation, the kitchen becomes inspection-ready on all shifts and any day. It is liberating and significantly less stressful when this culture of cleanliness has been achieved.



**Sandra D. Ratcliff, CEC** received her B.S. degree in Culinary Arts Management from the Art Institute of Atlanta, and is a Certified Executive Chef with the American Culinary Federation. She has over 32 years of experience in the foodservice industry. From 2002-2013 Ratcliff worked as a Corporate Director of Food Services for the largest post-acute healthcare organization in Georgia. Currently, she works for The Hansen Group as a manufacturer's representative for the foodservice industry.

## HANDWASHING

While handwashing is often viewed as a vital practice, it remains a top sanitation pitfall. Staff members must be thoroughly trained and frequently in-serviced on proper technique. Handwashing must be in accordance with the FDA's handwashing procedures, be thorough and often. Hands must be washed with soap under running water, rubbing hands and forearms vigorously for 15-20 seconds. Vigorous scrubbing between fingers and fingernails must occur to create a soapy lather. Rinse hands thoroughly and dry with an air dryer or single-use disposable paper towel.

According to the World Health Organization, "judicious washing of hands can significantly reduce bacterial contamination and the risk of foodborne illness." Set a good example for your staff by lathering up when appropriate and practicing proper handwashing technique.

## CLEANING VS. SANITIZING

People are often not clear on the difference between cleaning and sanitizing. When the difference between the two is unclear, it can become our third pitfall. In simple terms, cleaning is the process of removing food and other

types of soil from a surface. In contrast, sanitizing in kitchens is accomplished by using heat or chemicals. A surface or item must first be washed properly before it can be sanitized.

Chemical sanitizers that are approved for use in food applications are chlorine, iodine, and quaternary ammonium. Chemical sanitizers such as iodine and chlorine react with food and soil, making them less effective on surfaces or items that are not cleaned properly.

Temperature, concentration, and contact time are all important when it comes to chemical sanitizers.

follow manufacturer instructions.

- **Contact Time.** When using chemical sanitizers, the manufacturer-recommended amount of contact time with the chemical must be followed. When contact time is not achieved, microorganisms will not be killed. It is suggested that a clock with a second hand be present above the pot and pan sinks, so employees know the amount of time that items are submerged in the sanitizer compartment.

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**IT IS IMPERATIVE** to have appropriate chemical testing strips to measure chemical sanitizer concentration. Test strips are specific to the type of sanitizer being used.



- **Temperature.** Chemical sanitizers are to be used in water that is between 55°F (13°C) and 120°F (49°C).
- **Concentration.** Too much sanitizer can be toxic. Too little sanitizer will result in an inadequate reduction of microorganisms. Always read and

sanitizer concentration. Test strips are specific to the type of sanitizer being used. For example, if using a chlorine sanitizer, chlorine chemical test strips must be used to confirm that the proper level of sanitizer is present to kill microorganisms.

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Heat sanitizing in kitchens is primarily achieved with hot water. For heat sanitizing in a three-compartment sink, water must be at least 171°F (77°C). A sanitizing sink heater would need to be installed to maintain temperatures in a sink. These heaters mount underneath the sanitizing sink compartment and continuously circulate water to ensure that the sink stays at 171°F (77°C). When using a high-temperature warewashing machine to sanitize clean dishes, the final sanitizing rinse must be at least 180°F (82°C). For a stationary rack, single temperature machine's water must be at least 165°F (74°C). Cleaned items must maintain these temperatures for a minimum of 30 seconds to properly kill microorganisms.

### WET-NESTING

The fourth pitfall of concern is wet-nesting of washed dishes and other small wares. Wet-nesting occurs when wet dishes or pots and pans are stacked, preventing them from drying, and creating conditions that are ripe for microorganisms to grow.

FDA guidelines mandate that all wares should be air dried. Using towels to dry dishes is never permitted.

While air drying dishes sounds like a simple task, it is not as easy as it seems. Besides a well-ventilated room with an adequate number of drying racks, this often entails having enough dishes in circulation, so that washed and sanitized wares have a sufficient amount of time to dry on racks. If a kitchen is waiting for breakfast dishes to dry before they can serve lunch, it often leads to staff using wet plates to serve lunch.

Another area of concern is when fans are used to speed the drying process. When using a fan, it is critical to ensure that the fan is not blowing any contaminants on the clean and sanitized items. Common contaminants include dust from the fan or surfaces, or objects between the fan and the sanitized items, and condensation from overhead air conditioning vents.

### WATER LEAKS

Managers often overlook the fifth pitfall, but not inspectors. Foodservice directors might view leaking water as annoying, but harmless. But in fact,

leaking water poses one of the most significant risks in a kitchen. From that pesky leaking faucet, to the blocked drain hose in the walk-in freezer dumping non-potable water onto boxes of food, leaking water can be harmful in kitchens. While water is a precious commodity, it is also one of the key components in supporting the rapid growth of microorganisms. Dish rooms have a lot of water and steam, and often have inadequate ventilation. Excessive water combined with inadequate ventilation leads to mold, and moisture which can lead to insect infestation.

### STAY VIGILANT

The one certainty in kitchen operations is that ignoring maintenance concerns and not prioritizing sanitation is a fast track to poor outcomes. Employee retention, customer well-being, and job satisfaction all start with a kitchen that is managed with high expectations. Sanitation is not optional; it is a culture that all foodservice directors must embrace to achieve success. **E**

## REFERENCES

1. World Health Organization. *Hand washing and food safety fact sheet 2*. Accessed January 2019.
2. *Food Code 2017*. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Accessed January 2019.

### FDA GUIDELINES

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This Level 1 article assumes that the reader has entry level knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to ensure a foundation of basic concepts of the subject matter.

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- Hands must be washed with soap under running water for how many seconds?
  - 5-10 seconds
  - 15-20 seconds
  - 30-45 seconds
- According to the World Health Organization, judicious washing of hands can
  - Cause serious chapping and chafing
  - Trigger illness due to contaminated water
  - Significantly reduce bacterial contamination and the risk of foodborne illness
- Cleaning is the process of removing food and soil from a surface, while sanitizing utilizes
  - Scrapers and brillo pads
  - Heat and chemicals
  - Alcohol and apple cider vinegar
- Chemical sanitizers that are approved for use in food applications are
  - Chlorine, iodine, and quaternary ammonium
  - Round-up, Windex, and Comet
  - Microwaving, steaming, and boiling
- What three factors are important when it comes to chemical sanitizers?
  - Hazard analysis, critical control points, corrective actions
  - Temperature, concentration, contact time
  - Trained staff, time of application, type of bacteria being targeted
- Wet-nesting refers to:
  - When pesky birds build nests in the gutters of structures
  - When pregnant employees prepare to take maternity leave
  - When wet dishes or pots and pans are stacked, preventing them from drying, and fostering bacteria growth
- Water leaks within a foodservice department
  - Are annoying, but not dangerous
  - Mean that the dietary aide needs to call a plumber
  - Can be harmful and contaminate foods

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