

Preventing foodborne illness in your restaurant

A single case of foodborne illness can do serious damage — not just to your customers' health, but to your reputation and bottom line. Lost revenue, lawsuits, and legal fees can add up quickly. But with the right safety practices, you can protect your guests, customers, and business.

Encourage frequent handwashing

Handwashing is one of the simplest and most effective ways to prevent foodborne illness. According to the FDA, employees should wash their hands after:

- Eating or drinking
- Smoking or using chewing tobacco
- Coughing, sneezing, or using a tissue
- Handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood
- Touching dirty equipment or their face or body

Even clean hands aren't always enough. Encourage employees to wear gloves when handling food — after washing their hands.

Prevent cross-contamination

Cross-contamination happens when germs spread from one surface or food item to another — like when someone handles raw chicken and then chops vegetables on the same board.

To reduce the risk:

- Keep raw and ready-to-eat foods separate
- Use different cutting boards and utensils for meats, produce, and dairy
- Wash produce under warm running water
- Clean and sanitize all prep areas, utensils, and sinks before and after use
- Use a separate sink for handwashing
- Cover and properly store all food



Train your staff

Your team is your first line of defense. Make sure everyone understands how to safely prepare, cook, and store food—and why it matters.

- Train staff on handwashing, cooking temperatures, and proper cleaning methods
- Keep thermometers on hand to monitor cooking and holding temps
- Send employees home if they've been sick within the last 48 hours
- Require certified food safety training
- Check local and state health regulations for specific requirements

Clean, sanitize, and disinfect

These terms often get mixed up, but each plays a different role in keeping your kitchen safe:

- Cleaning removes visible dirt and food debris using soap or detergent
- Sanitizing reduces bacteria using approved chemical agents; follow label directions carefully for contact time and dilution
- Disinfecting kills both bacteria and viruses; it's typically reserved for bathrooms and non-food-contact surfaces, where stronger chemicals and longer contact times are required

Lead by example

Food safety starts with leadership. Make sure your menu includes warnings for any items served under the recommended internal temperature, and clearly note potential allergens or cross-contact risks. Keep accurate records of ingredients, shelf life, and cooking temperatures, and consistently reinforce your food safety policies with staff. When management prioritizes safety and models the right behaviors, it sets the tone for the entire team—helping protect your customers and your restaurant's reputation.



717 Mulberry Street
Des Moines, IA 50309

515-280-2511
800-447-2295

emcinsurance.com



Disclaimer: The contents of this brochure, including the sample case files, are provided for informational purposes only and are not intended to be all-inclusive. Refer to the issued policy for specific details regarding coverages, conditions and exclusions. In the event of a conflict between the terms contained herein and the policy, the policy terms and conditions will prevail.

©Employers Mutual Casualty Company 2026. All rights reserved. RC8500 (1-26)