

The Importance of Food-Safe Schools



Foodborne illness does not occur just in the cafeteria.



Other school facilities can be involved with foodborne illnesses.

School events can also be the source of foodborne illnesses.



Food brought from home can also be involved.



Incidence of Foodborne Illnesses

- 292 cases reported in schools during the 1990s.*
- Affected 16,000 students.†
- Not all cases are reported, making the actual number far greater. †
- 76,000,000 cases/yr. †
- 325,000 hospitalizations/yr. †
- 5,000 deaths/yr. †

* General Accounting Office. Food safety: continued vigilance needed to ensure safety of school meals. Statement of Lawrence J. Dyckman, Director, Natural Resources and Environment. Washington, DC: April 30, 2002. Available from: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d02669t.pdf>.

† Mead, P.S., et al. Food-related illness and death in the United States. 1999; 5(5). Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/eid/vol5no5/mead.htm>.

Stories of School-Based Foodborne Illnesses

- In 1998, 11 elementary students became ill; spread to a 2-year-old child, who subsequently developed renal failure.
- In 2000, an *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreak caused by a self-serve food bar with unsupervised handling of uncovered food, lack of time for handwashing before eating, and lack of handwashing facilities.

Medical Costs

- Medical costs and productivity losses due to the seven most prevalent and serious foodborne pathogens range from \$6.4B to \$34B annually.*
- This doesn't include the burden on society for chronic illnesses caused by foodborne pathogens.

* U.S. Food and Drug Administration, et al. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office; 1997.



Litigation Costs

- A Washington school was issued a \$4.6M judgment after 11 children were infected with an *E. coli* O15:H7 bacteria linked to ground beef served in the school lunch.*

* National School Boards Association. Experts advise schools on food safety issues. Alexandria, VA: March 26, 2001.

Public Relations Costs

- The reputation of schools, particularly food-services, suffers.



Attitudes and Behaviors of Middle School Students*

- Most students “slightly agree” that they have the skills to prevent foodborne illnesses.
- Most students don’t think they are susceptible to foodborne illnesses.
- 71% seldom wash hands before eating at school or a restaurant.
- 27% seldom wash hands before handling food or eating at home.

* Haapala, I., Probart, C. (2004). Food safety knowledge, perceptions, and behaviors among middle school students. 36:71-76.

Preventing Foodborne Illness at School

- Emergence of resistant and exceptionally hazardous strains of foodborne microorganisms.*
- Occurring at a time when there are even fewer experienced adults in the household to teach food safety lessons to young people at home.*

* Haapala, I., Probart, C. (2004). Food safety knowledge, perceptions, and behaviors among middle school students. 36:71-76.