



Choose restaurants carefully to avoid foodborne illness

By Carol Ann Burtness, University of Minnesota Extension

ST. PAUL, Minn. (3/17/2008) — When choosing a restaurant, you hope the establishment will prepare and serve safe food. Most restaurants work hard to make sure the food you eat is safe, but 61 percent of the 2005 Minnesota Department of Health's list of confirmed foodborne illnesses were linked to restaurants.

All food establishments are required to follow food safety guidelines (Minnesota Food Code). Most establishments have an employee trained and certified in food safety and have responsible employees who ensure that food is handled safely during all hours of operation. Food establishments are also inspected one or two times every year.

The following tips can help you choose restaurants that follow food safety guidelines to reduce foodborne illnesses:

- Avoid restaurants that look dirty or poorly maintained. If the establishment appears neat and clean, you get the impression that the management cares about doing things right.
- A dirty dining room may indicate a dirty kitchen or unclean employees where food safety is not a priority.
- Check bathrooms. If bathrooms do not have warm water, soap or a sanitary way to dry hands, the establishment probably is not concerned about cleanliness.
- Are servers clean? Are their hands and nails clean? Do they keep their hands away from their face and hair? Do they wash their hands often? Most food-borne illnesses are linked to unclean employees.
- How do servers handle your eating utensils? Do they hold glasses by the rim where your mouth will touch? Do they handle eating utensils by the eating area? This may indicate poor food safety training.
- When served a meal, check how well it is cooked before you eat it. If it's not served hot and thoroughly cooked, send it back.
- If food on the buffet line is not steamy, you may want to pass. Hot foods should be at least 140 degrees on the buffet or when it is served to you.
- When employees are refilling food on the buffet, they should replace the container with fresh food and not add new food to food already on the buffet.
- Make sure cold foods are cold (41 degrees or colder) or on ice when they are displayed on the buffet line or when served to you. Fresh foods should look and smell fresh. If not, the product may be old or has not been handled properly.
- Choose restaurants with good reputations.

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