

Factors Linked with Food Workers Working When Sick

EHS-Net Study Findings and Recommendations

Sick food workers have been linked with past foodborne illness outbreaks. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends that food workers not work when sick with symptoms of foodborne illness. Such symptoms include vomiting and diarrhea.

We don't know how often food workers follow the FDA advice. If we learn more about which food workers are likely to work when they are sick, we can make recommendations to stop them from working when sick. Lowering the number of workers who work when they are sick can reduce the number of foodborne illness outbreaks.

What the Study Described

The purpose of this study was to describe traits of food workers who have worked when sick with vomiting or diarrhea.

What the Study Found

Some groups of food workers were more likely than others to say they had worked a shift in the past year when sick with vomiting or diarrhea:

Workers More Likely to Say They Had Worked When Sick	Workers Less Likely to Say They Had Worked When Sick
Males	Females
Without cooking and dishwashing duties	With cooking and dishwashing duties
With food storage duties	Without food storage duties
With 2 or more years of experience	With less than 2 years of experience
Who said fear of losing their job affects their decisions to work when sick	Who said that fear of job loss was not a factor in their decisions
Who said concern about leaving coworkers short on staff affects their decisions to work when sick	Who said that this concern was not a factor in their decisions

EHS-Net found that some groups of food workers were more likely than others to say they had worked a shift in the past year when sick with vomiting or diarrhea.



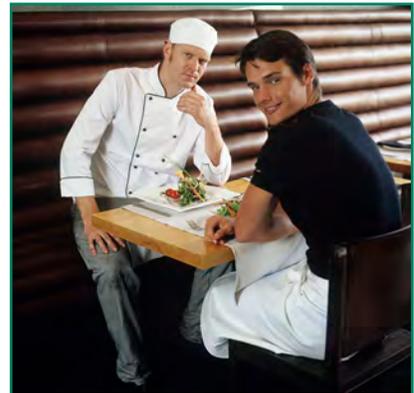
This study was conducted by the Environmental Health Specialists Network (EHS-Net). EHS-Net is a federally funded collaboration of federal, state, and local environmental health specialists and epidemiologists working to better understand the environmental causes of foodborne and waterborne illness. Visit EHS-Net at <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EHSNet>.

Our findings suggest that many things affect whether workers work when sick with vomiting or diarrhea. These things include

- Personal traits (gender, job experience).
- Financial concerns (fear of job loss).
- Social concerns (worry about coworkers).

EHS-Net Recommends

Food safety programs should stress that food workers should not work when they are sick. Programs need to know and address what factors affect workers' decisions to work when sick before they can lower the number of workers who work when sick. For example, restaurant practices that ensure adequate staffing if a worker is sick could reduce the number of workers who work when they are sick.



Key Terms

Environmental health specialists: public health workers who enforce health and safety standards related to food and other consumer products.

Foodborne illness: an illness caused by germs in food.

Foodborne illness outbreak: when two or more people have the same sickness after eating food from the same place.