

# Food Safety Certification and Knowledge

## EHS-Net Study Findings and Recommendations

More than half of foodborne illness outbreaks in the United States are related to restaurants or delis.

Sick food workers have been linked with past foodborne illness outbreaks.

To combat restaurant-related outbreaks, many public health agencies encourage or require food safety certification for restaurant kitchen managers and sometimes workers.

Food safety certification efforts are based on the belief that certification leads to greater food safety knowledge. But we need to know more about the link between certification and knowledge.

### What the Study Described

The purpose of this study was to examine the link between food safety certification and food safety knowledge. We also examined the link between knowledge and other things, like restaurant traits and job experience.

### What the Study Found

Food safety certification promotes food safety knowledge for both managers and workers.

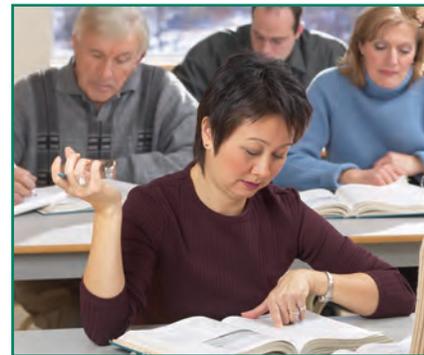
Food safety knowledge is complex, influenced by both restaurant and personal traits.

Those whose primary language is not English likely have difficulty learning about food safety or taking tests on food safety in an English-only environment.

Managers in chain restaurants and larger restaurants may have greater food safety knowledge because these types of restaurants may have more resources for food safety training. These types of restaurants may also focus on food safety more than other restaurants.

Managers and workers who had been certified in food safety were more likely to pass a food safety knowledge test than those who were not certified. Additionally, managers and workers whose primary language was English were more likely to pass a knowledge test than those whose primary language was not English.

Other factors linked with passing the knowledge test included working in a chain restaurant, working in a larger restaurant, having more job-related experience, and having more job duties.



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>.

The fact that workers with managers with less food safety knowledge had less food safety knowledge themselves suggests that manager knowledge directly affects worker knowledge. Managers who have poor food safety knowledge will not be able to teach food safety to their workers.

## Study Results

For both managers and workers, greater food safety knowledge was related to

- Being certified in food safety
- Speaking English as a primary language

For managers, greater food safety knowledge was related to

- Having more manager experience
- Working in a chain restaurant
- Working in a larger restaurant.

For workers, greater food safety knowledge was related to

- Having a manager with greater food safety knowledge
- Speaking English as a primary language
- Having a lot of job duties.



## EHS-Net Recommends

Future prevention efforts should focus on

- Encouraging certification of managers and workers.
- Applying food safety training programs that adequately address the needs of employees with limited English speaking and reading skills. The Food and Drug Administration provides these kinds of training resources.
- Ensuring that independent and smaller restaurants have access to food safety training programs and are encouraged to use them.

### 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