

# Food Safety Practices of Restaurant Workers

## EHS-Net Study Findings and Recommendations

Studies show that foodborne illness is linked to eating outside the home (for example, in restaurants). They also show that food workers often do not handle food safely. It is important to learn more about how restaurant workers prepare food. This can help us find ways to improve how they prepare food.

### What the Study Described

This study looked at four things restaurant workers do that affect food safety:

- Wash their hands when they should.
- Use gloves properly.
- Use a thermometer to check the temperature of cooked food.
- Not work when they had vomiting or diarrhea.

Vomiting and diarrhea are symptoms of illnesses that can be passed through food.

### What the Study Found

Food workers reported risky food prep practices. These practices include

- Not washing hands or changing gloves between touching raw meat or poultry and ready-to-eat food. This increases risk for cross contamination of those foods.
- Not using a thermometer to check the temperature of cooked foods. This increases the risk that food will not reach temperatures hot enough to kill germs.
- Working while they have vomiting or diarrhea. This may expose customers to illness.

These practices differed by workers'

- Age.
- Experience.
- Work duties.

EHS-Net found that

- Many food workers said they engaged in risky food preparation (food prep) practices.
- Younger, less-experienced workers more often reported risky food prep practices.
- Workers in independent restaurants (compared to chain restaurants) more often reported risky food prep practices.



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/>

Workers in chain restaurants said they used thermometers more often than other workers did. This may be because chain restaurants may be more likely to make rules for these kinds of routine actions.

The percent of workers saying that they had worked with vomiting or diarrhea was small. But this number is still cause for concern: sick workers can expose lots of people to illness.

### EHS-Net Recommends

Restaurant managers and food-safety programs should work to improve food prep practices. Efforts should focus on

- Younger, less-experienced workers.
- Workers in independent restaurants.

Researchers should do more studies to find out what affects these food prep practices. This information could be used to find barriers to safe food prep. Fixing those barriers could help improve practices and reduce illness.



### Key Term

**Chain restaurant:** one with the same name and operations as other restaurants. Restaurants with the same name in many cities are chain restaurants.

**Foodborne illness:** an illness caused by germs in food.

**Independent restaurant:** one that does not have the same name or operations as any other restaurant.

**Ready-to-eat food:** food that can be served without washing, cooking, or other preparation.