

Manager Practices about Workers Working When They Are 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 restaurant food workers not work when sick with symptoms of foodborne illness. FDA also makes recommendations about symptoms that should keep workers from working. Those symptoms include vomiting and diarrhea and other symptoms.

We don't know how many restaurants have policies about these issues. We also don't know much about what happens in restaurants when managers and workers are sick. If we learn more about what happens when staff are sick, we can make recommendations to stop them from working when sick. Lowering the number of staff 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

- restaurant policies for sick workers,
- what happens when managers work when sick, and
- what happens when workers work when sick.

What the Study Found

Although most restaurants have ill worker policies, many of them are inadequate.

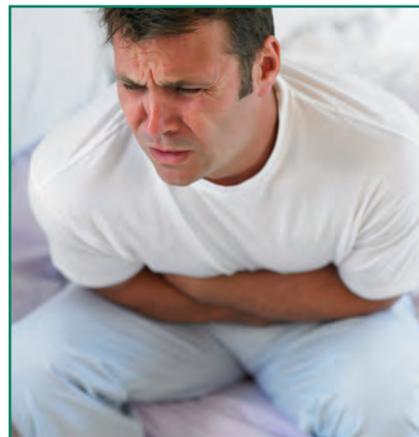
Some managers and workers have worked with symptoms consistent with foodborne illness. Managers are more likely than workers to take steps to keep others from getting sick. Such steps include washing their hands more often and not working with food.

Most restaurants have ill worker policies, but many of them are incomplete.

Some managers and workers have worked with symptoms consistent with foodborne illness.

Most managers did not ask sick workers if they had foodborne illness symptoms. And in most cases, workers make their own decisions to work when sick.

Managers and workers work when sick for many reasons. They include personal, financial, and social reasons.



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>.

Most managers did not ask sick workers if they had foodborne illness symptoms. And in most cases, workers make their own decisions to work when sick. This does not follow FDA guidance that managers should base decisions on whether sick workers should work on workers' symptoms.

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EHS-Net Recommends

Future prevention efforts should focus on addressing the sick worker policy and practice shortcomings found in this study.

Restaurants should be encouraged to

- Include information in their policies about which symptoms should lead to workers being kept from working.
- Address managers' and workers' reasons for working when sick.

Managers should be encouraged to take a more proactive role in deciding whether sick workers should work.

Managers and workers should be encouraged to not work when sick with foodborne illness symptoms.



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.