

Was There a Recent Update to the FDA Food Code?

THE US FOOD AND DRUG Administration (FDA), in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), released the 2013 Food Code (8th edition) this past fall. The FDA issues new editions of the Food Code every 4 years and supplements are released every 2 years as guidelines are revised to reflect the latest food-related research. The revisions contained in this edition reflect changes, additions, deletions, and format modifications listed in the Supplement to the 2009 FDA Food Code and recommendations developed during the 2012 biennial meeting of the Conference for Food Protection. It represents FDA's best advice for a uniform system of provisions that addresses the safety and protection of food offered at retail and in foodservice facilities.

The Food Code is neither law nor mandated regulations, but is a model code and reference document for state, city, county, and tribal agencies that regulate operations such as restaurants, retail food stores, food vendors, and foodservice operations in institutions such as schools, hospitals, assisted living, nursing homes, and child-care centers. As of 2012, all 50 states and 3 of the 6 territories reported using retail codes patterned after previous editions of the Food Codes.¹ The Food Code establishes practical, science-based guidance to reduce risk factors that are known to cause or contribute to foodborne illness outbreaks associated with retail and foodservice establishments and is an important part of strengthening our nation's food protection system.¹ It also provides a system of

prevention and overlapping safeguards designed to minimize foodborne illness.

Foodborne illness in the United States is a major cause of preventable illness and avoidable economic burden. The CDC estimates that foodborne diseases cause approximately 48 million illnesses, 128,000 hospitalizations, and 3,000 deaths in the United States each year.² The most susceptible individuals for foodborne illness are preschool-age children, older adults in health care facilities, and those with an impaired immune system. The annual cost of foodborne illness in terms of pain and suffering, reduced productivity, and medical costs are estimated to be \$10 to \$83 billion.¹

Reviewing the data reports from foodborne illness outbreak, five major risk factors related to employee behaviors and preparation practices in retail and foodservice establishments have been identified:

- Improper holding temperatures;
- Inadequate cooking, such as undercooking raw shell eggs;
- Contaminated equipment;
- Food from unsafe sources; and
- Poor personal hygiene.

The Food Code addresses appropriate guidelines to control these risk factors and further establishes public health interventions to protect consumer health. Some of the significant changes to the 2013 Food Code include the following³:

- Revisions to the minimum cooking temperatures associated with procedures such as noncontinuous cooking and circumstances under which bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat foods is permitted.
- Stronger requirements for cleaning and sanitizing equipment used in preparing raw foods that are major food allergens.
- Restaurants and food stores must post signs notifying their customers that inspection information is available for review.
- Nontyphoidal *Salmonella* is added to the list of illnesses that

food workers are required to report to their management and that prompts management to exclude or restrict employees from working with food.

- New requirements that better address emerging trends in food establishments such as the use of reduced oxygen packaging methods and the reuse and refilling of take-home food containers.

The most important and useful feature of the Food Code is the framework it provides for designing a food safety program. In addition, the code promotes the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system for the assurance of food safety.⁴ HACCP, developed by the National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods, is a management system in which food safety is addressed through the analysis and control of biological, chemical, and physical hazards from raw material production, procurement, and handling to manufacturing, distribution, and consumption of the finished product. Preventing problems from occurring is the paramount goal underlying any HACCP system.

These are only a few of the new guidelines from the 2013 Food Codes. For complete information regarding the new Food Codes and HACCP, refer to the References.

References

1. US Food and Drug Administration. Food Code 2013. <http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/ucm374275.htm>. Accessed November 22, 2013.
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4. US Food and Drug Administration. HACCP Principles & Application Guidelines. <http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/HACCP/ucm2006801.htm>. Accessed November 22, 2013.

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