

## Vol 2 ISSUE 37, Food Safety Month – Part II

Last week, I shared five “first steps” to food safety that focused on how to handle food preparation tasks safely. This week, I am sharing how to keep your home food preparation environment safe when preparing meals. In the spirit of National Food Safety month, I thought I would include a self-test\*\* for readers to see how much they already know about this aspect of food safety.

Question #1 – What is the proper sequence of steps in cleaning and sanitizing a kitchen surface?

- a. Allow the surface to air-dry
- b. Wash surface
- c. Scrape or remove food bits from the surface
- d. Sanitize surface
- e. Rinse surface

The key to maintaining a food-safe kitchen is a two-part process – Clean then Sanitize. You might think that these two steps are the same thing but they are not.

**Cleaning** occurs by removing dirt and/or food particles from food preparation surfaces. Wash all surfaces with soap and warm water. Rinse the surface with clean water and let it air dry or use a clean paper towel.

**Sanitizing** reduces germs to a safe level to reduce the risk of illness. Note that I didn't say you would be able to remove ALL germs, but rather reduce them to a safe level. It is unrealistic to think that you can get rid of all germs, but they can be managed!

Sanitize surfaces with diluted chlorine bleach (1 tsp. bleach mixed with 1 quart water) poured into a spray bottle. Do not use fragranced bleach as it is not food-safe. Spray the kitchen surfaces, refrigerator interior, and faucets with solution. Let the solution sit for 1 minute then wipe dry with a clean paper towel. Another option is to use undiluted white distilled vinegar. Warm a cup of the vinegar in a microwave safe container to 130°F then use a funnel to pour warmed vinegar into a spray bottle. Spray the warmed vinegar onto surfaces and let sit for 1 minute. Wipe dry with a clean paper towel.

Cleaning and sanitizing your kitchen surfaces should be part of routine cleaning and include counters, cutting boards, dishes, knives, utensils, pots and pans, and refrigerator surfaces (outside and inside.) If you are uncertain whether this process was used, you should follow these steps before use.

Question #1 Answer: c, b, e, d, a

Question #2 – Circle the letter by those statements that give an example of when you must clean and sanitize food-contact surfaces.

- a. After 30 minutes if items are in constant use
- b. After they are used

- c. Any time food handlers are interrupted during a task - Answering the phone, for example.
- d. Before they are used
- e. When they are moved from one part of the kitchen to another
- f. Once a day
- g. After four hours if items are in constant use – Using a cutting board for vegetable preparation before canning, for example.

Food contact surfaces include anything that touches food. This would include your hands, cutting boards, knives, countertops, or cookware, to name a few.

Food contact surfaces should be cleaned and sanitized every 4 hours if being used constantly (not every 30 minutes). Past 4 hours is when the level of germs and the risk of contamination begin to become unsafe.

All food contact surfaces should be cleaned and sanitized after every use and allowed to air-dry in order to avoid adding contaminants from a dish towel to their surface. Cloth towels, dish cloths, and sponges provide a great place for germs and bacteria to congregate and grow. Drying a food contact surface with a towel can re-contaminate the surface. If you choose to use such items in your home kitchen, you should put them in the washer after a single use to ensure they are clean and safe at the beginning of every use.

By being intentional about your methods, you can be assured that the surfaces are clean and sanitized before you begin your next meal preparation. This makes it unnecessary to do this again before use. Unless, of course, you have other people working in your kitchen that may not follow safe food handling practices as carefully. If you are sharing your kitchen with others (such as kids or a spouse) in your home you may need to do some reconnaissance to ensure sanitary conditions.

An important note on hand washing: Washing your hands between each food contact is critical. You may recall that I shared in last week's article that I wash my hands 20 – 30 times a day. You are about to understand why.

If you are preparing a meal in your kitchen and the phone rings (which is the story of my life!), you need to wash your hands with warm soapy water for 20 seconds before you pick up the receiver AND wash your hands again with warm soapy water after you hang it up. Better, yet – let the answering machine pick up the call!

If you scratch your head, let the dog out, change pages in a cookbook, or simply need to “dig” your favorite spatula out of the drawer, you need to wash your hands for 20 seconds in warm soapy water before and after any of those tasks, as well. Your goal is to prevent cross-contamination. So, in the last two paragraphs alone, I have explained how I might have washed my hands 10 times, and lunch still isn't on the table!

This leads us to our last and final question.

Question #3 – What is cross-contamination? To find that out, you'll have to read next week's article! Until next time, keep living resourcefully!

\*\* Source: National Restaurant Association's Education Foundation (NRAEF) <http://www.foodsafetymonth.com/Activities>.