

Avoiding the Passage of Infectious Diseases During Food Preparation:
Information for Cottage Food Operators in California

Background

Over 9 million cases of infectious diseases are transmitted by food and beverages in the United States each year.¹ In California, Cottage Food regulations allow certain “not potentially hazardous foods” to be prepared in non-commercial settings, including in private homes. While the list of allowed Cottage Food products are less likely than other foods to carry infectious diseases, it is still possible to pass illness through these foods if precautions are not followed. This sheet is being provided to help Cottage Food Operators understand how to avoid passing illnesses in foods that are produced in homes and private kitchens.

Recognizing Contagious Illnesses in Persons Preparing Foods

According to law (Health and Safety Code Division 104, Part 7, Chapter 11.5, Section 114365), “a person with a contagious illness shall refrain from work in the registered or permitted area of the cottage food operation.” One way to know that you have a contagious illness is if your health care provider has told you that you have an infection. People who should stay away from food preparation areas because they may have a contagious illness include people with the following signs or symptoms:

- 1) Diarrhea either alone or with vomiting, fever (an oral temperature over 100° F or 37.8° C) or stomach cramps
- 2) Vomiting with either diarrhea or two other symptoms, such as fever and stomach cramps
- 3) A fever with or without shaking chills, and with or without muscle aches

Avoiding Contamination of Your Food Product

Germs that cause infectious diseases are transmitted by mucus when we cough, by droplets when we sneeze, or (especially for food-borne diseases) by not washing hands well after using the bathroom. It is important to stay away from food preparation areas when having symptoms. It is also important to cover your mouth and nose whenever you cough or sneeze in a food preparation area. It is also important to wash your hands regularly before contact with any food product and especially after using the bathroom. Washing with soap for 20 seconds before rinsing with water is important. Hand sanitizers may not work well if hands are visibly dirty, so even if sanitizers are used it is recommended to periodically wash with soap and water during food preparation.

Another source of infection can be drainage from open wounds or infections on the hands. All open wounds should be covered by a waterproof dressing while in food preparation areas. Health and Safety Code Chapter 3, Section 113973, requires gloves to be worn when there are open sores on the hands of food workers.

When Can an Ill Food Worker Return to Food Preparation?

The length of time before a person is no longer able to pass an infection through a food product is different depending upon the type of infection. For most common conditions, 48 hours after complete clearance of symptoms is sufficient. However, for more serious infections, like Salmonella, Shigella, Campylobacter and Hepatitis A, it is important to seek the advice of your health care provider.

¹ Surveillance for Foodborne Outbreaks – United States 2009-2010, MMWR; CDC January 25, 2013, 62(03); 41-47