

### ServSafe® Pre-class Reading

Anyone operating a food establishment today has a tremendous responsibility to protect the public health from foodborne illnesses. While the majority of cases of foodborne illness go unreported, those that are reported shed light on the causes and sources of these illness as well as the precautions we, as food service professionals, need to take to maintain food safety. As a participant in the ServSafe certification class, you should familiarize yourself with the rudiments of food safety. Prior to your class, we recommend you take a few minutes to review the material in this document. It should provide you with some basic definitions and fundamentals on which this class is based.

**Foodborne illness** is defined as a disease carried or transmitted to people by food or water. A **foodborne-illness outbreak** is an incident in which 2 or more people experience the same illness after eating the same food. An outbreak is confirmed when laboratory analysis or results show that a specific food is the source of the illness.

A foodborne illness outbreak can cost an establishment thousands of dollars and can even result in the closure of that facility. Other **costs of foodborne-illness** include:

- The loss of customers and sales
- Loss of prestige and reputation,
- Lawsuits resulting in lawyer and court fees
- Increased insurance premiums
- Lowered employee morale
- Increased absenteeism
- The need for retraining employees and embarrassment

While individuals with healthy immune systems often fight off foodborne illnesses without needing medical attention, there are certain demographic groups that are at higher risk of contracting these illnesses and are more susceptible to them. **High Risk Populations** include:

- Infants
- The elderly
- Pregnant women
- People taking medication
- People who are ill (immune compromised).

The characteristics of a food also play a role in how likely a foodborne illness will be transmitted. **Foods most likely to be unsafe** are:

- Foods that are moist
- High in protein or carbohydrates
- Low or neutral in acidity.

The foods most commonly found in this category are known as **potentially hazardous foods**. They include: milk, meats products, fish, poultry, shell eggs, shellfish, cooked rice, baked potatoes, garlic and oil mixtures, sprouts, sliced melons, tofu, soy protein in meat alternatives.

Reported cases of foodborne illness usually involved multiple causes, but generally there are **3 ways foods become unsafe**:

- Time-temp abuse (cooking foods to an improper temperature)
- Cross-contamination (raw foods dripping onto ready to eat foods)
- Poor personal hygiene (failure wash hands before beginning work)

Lastly, unsafe food often results from contamination, which is the presence of harmful substances in the food. In general, **food can become contaminated in one of 3 ways**:

- **Biological** – bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites
- **Chemical** – cleaning chemicals, pesticides and caustics
- **Physical** – foreign objects such as hair, class, fingernails and bandages