

Responding to Contamination Events

Clean-up of Vomiting and Diarrheal Events

When an employee, customer, or other individual vomits or has a diarrheal event in a food establishment, there is a real potential for the spread of harmful pathogens in the establishment. Putting the proper response into action in a timely manner can help reduce the likelihood that food may become contaminated and that others may become ill as a result of the accident. The Food Code was recently amended to require written procedures as specified under Section 2-501.11.

What should a written plan address?

When developing written procedures that address the need for the cleaning and disinfection of vomitus and/or fecal matter contamination event, a food establishment should consider:

- The procedure for containment and removal of any discharges, including airborne particulates;
- The procedure for cleaning, sanitizing, and as necessary, the disinfection of any surfaces that may have become contaminated;
- The procedures for the evaluation and disposal of any food that may have been exposed to discharges;
- The availability of effective disinfectants, such as EPA registered disinfection products sufficient to inactivate norovirus, personal protective equipment, and other cleaning and disinfecting equipment and appurtenances intended for response and their proper use;
- Procedures for the disposal and/or cleaning and disinfection of tools and equipment used to clean up vomitus or fecal matter;
- The circumstances under which a food employee is to wear personal protective equipment for cleaning and disinfecting of a contaminated area;
- Notification to food employees on the proper use of personal protective equipment and procedures to follow in containing, cleaning, and disinfecting a contaminated area;
- The segregation of areas that may have been contaminated so as to minimize the unnecessary exposure of employees, customers and others in the facility to the discharges or to surfaces or food that may have become contaminated;
- Minimize risk of disease transmission through the exclusion and restriction of ill employees as specified in §2-201.12 of the Food Code;
- Minimize risk of disease transmission through the prompt removal of ill customers and others from areas of food preparation, service and storage; and
- The conditions under which the plan will be implemented.

Why are written procedures necessary?

According to the CDC, Norovirus is the leading cause of foodborne illness outbreaks in the United States. More specifically, Noroviruses are the most common cause of sporadic cases and outbreaks of acute gastroenteritis. Noroviruses can be highly contagious, and it is thought that an inoculum of as few as 10-18 viral particles may be sufficient to infect an individual. Transmission occurs via foodborne and person-to-person routes, airborne inhalation of vomitus droplets, and also through contact with contaminated environmental surfaces.

In addition, the potential transmission level of Norovirus shed in the feces as levels up to 1 trillion viral particles per gram of feces and one projectile vomiting incident can contaminate the environment with 300,000 viral particles. Norovirus causes acute onset vomiting (often explosive) and diarrhea (also often explosive) which can contaminate surfaces and become airborne increasing the chances of additional infections.