



# IMPORTANT INFORMATION

## for Florida's Hospitality Industry



**ATTENTION: Public Food Service Establishments**

Number: 2002-01

Date: 2002 March 25

**SUBJECT: Hepatitis A Outbreak**

Food service operators must be particularly aware of hepatitis A, a highly contagious disease. Polk County is currently experiencing a significant increase in the number of hepatitis A cases. Because the next outbreak could happen anywhere, all food service establishments must take precautions. A single infected worker preparing or serving food, or handling utensils, glassware or dishes can infect your customers and other employees.

This disease is transmitted to persons by the fecal-oral route through unwashed hands and poor personal hygiene. Early symptoms include fever, malaise, lack of appetite, nausea and abdominal discomfort, followed in a few days by jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes). Illness can last anywhere from 1-2 weeks to several months. It is critical that operators maintain a heightened awareness and exclude from the work place anyone who displays these symptoms. A person with hepatitis A can be contagious up to 10 days prior to exhibiting any of the symptoms mentioned above.

There are several strategies that can be used to help prevent the spread of hepatitis A as well as other foodborne illnesses. The top three preventive health measures include:

1. **Promote good personal hygiene and proper handwashing techniques.** Because of the nature of hepatitis A, it is imperative that food service establishments follow ongoing procedures for proper handwashing and personal hygiene including no bare hand contact of ready-to-eat foods.

**Proper Hand Washing Technique**

- Wash with hot soapy water
- Vigorously rub lathered hands for at least 20 seconds, paying particular attention to the areas underneath the fingernails and between the fingers
- Completely rinse the hands with clean water
- Thoroughly dry the hands with disposable towels or other sanitary hand drying devices

**Hands Must Be Washed After:**

- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Using the restroom                | Handling uncooked foods, especially raw meat, poultry or fish |
| Handling garbage                  | Coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose                       |
| Playing with or touching pets     | Handling soiled equipment or utensils                         |
| Eating, drinking or using tobacco | Contaminating the hands in any manner                         |

**Hands Must Be Washed Before:**

- Preparing or eating food
- Treating a cut or wound
- Inserting or removing contact lenses

2. **Exclude ill food workers from working with food, clean equipment, utensils, linens, unwrapped single-service and single-use articles.** Ill food workers must not work in the food establishment until symptoms subside. Current code language specifies that, in the case of *Salmonella Typhi*, *Shigella*, *Escherichia coli* 0157:H7 and hepatitis A; laboratory tests are needed to confirm that the food worker is free of the illness. Before being allowed to return to work, the excluded employee must provide written medical documentation from a licensed physician. The owner/operator must then obtain approval from the regulatory authority to remove the exclusion and allow the worker to return to work at the food service establishment. Contact the local county health department for assistance on this issue.
3. **Encourage ill food workers to seek medical attention.** Ill food workers should be encouraged to seek medical attention and treatment. Early diagnosis and treatment can prevent hepatitis A from spreading to close contacts, such as restaurant customers and employees.

Work with the local county health department and other health care practitioners to help prevent the spread of this illness throughout the state. If you have questions regarding these preventive measures, contact your local county health department or local Division office.

**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL REGULATION**

Jeb Bush, *Governor*

**Division of Hotels and Restaurants**

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