

# Food (Safety) for Thought

## Tricky Tomatoes & Precarious Peppers

This summer saw the largest foodborne illness outbreak the nation has experienced. The bacteria Salmonella Saintpaul infected over 1,400 people in the US, the District of Columbia and Canada. The early reports indicated that raw, fresh tomatoes were the culprit. However, even after tomatoes were pulled from shelves, illnesses kept occurring. A case-control study was initiated, where people who became ill were compared to people who did not become ill. During this portion of the investigation, three foods were found among those became ill, including tomatoes, jalapeno peppers and fresh cilantro. Further investigation of larger clusters of cases pointed to jalapeno peppers as the source, and not tomatoes. Fresh, raw jalapeno peppers from Mexico did test positive for the outbreak strain of Salmonella Saintpaul. Although no tomatoes ever tested positive for the organism, jalapeno peppers do not account for 100% of the cases of illness. However, not everyone who became ill ate jalapeno peppers, so there is likely at least one other source of illness, such as tomatoes. At present, information indicates that jalapeño peppers and serrano peppers grown, harvested, or packed in Mexico are the cause of some clusters and are major food vehicles for the outbreak.

Although tomatoes currently on the market are safe, raw tomatoes consumed early in the outbreak are still under investigation.

The latest information can be found at <http://cdc.gov/salmonella/saintpaul/>

One of the major questions regarding this outbreak was “Why did it take so long to determine the source?” There can be a three week time lag between the consumption of the suspect food & the laboratory confirmed diagnosis of an illness. During that time, many people have forgotten what they’ve consumed in specific detail, much less whether the tomato they ate was a round tomato or a roma tomato. Also, tomatoes, are perishable. The tomatoes implicated in an illness are not likely to be from the same batch found in someone’s refrigerator after three weeks. Finally, many tomatoes are shipped from a farm to at least one or two distributors along the way, so one distributor may be receiving tomatoes from several farms to several dozen farms. Once you find the correct distributor, it can be difficult to pinpoint the individual farm that shipped produce to that distributor. The final difficulty is determining which food of several commonly eaten together is the culprit, such as tomatoes, jalapenos and cilantro in fresh salsa.

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## Keeping your cool: Refrigeration temps in hot weather

Even though the kids are going back to school, it is still summertime and we see some hot weather at this time of year. You may have noticed that your refrigeration temperatures are struggling to keep up with the warmer weather. Even commercial refrigerators have a difficult time maintaining foods at a safe 41F or below in hot weather.

Maintenance, such as cleaning condenser coils and allowing adequate air flow around compressors, as well as adjustment, can help keep those cold foods cold. As always, we strongly recommend daily temperature checks to keep problems to a minimum.

If you notice a problem with your cooler, do not continue to use it to store potentially hazardous foods.

Move or discard the foods, as necessary, and contact your maintenance company for repair. In the meantime, plan on other methods to keep your food cold. You can set up ice baths for small quantities of in use product or use other coolers to store your necessary items. Remember that an ice bath only works if the ice is surrounding the product & keep checking those temperatures!

# Emergency Action Plans

It's inevitable that the power will go out at the most inopportune time or that your city or township will issue a boil water advisory. But, fear not! You have the tools & resources at your fingertips to help you through these obstacles (at least from a food safety point of view). Last year, Washtenaw County Sanitarians distributed over 1,000 Emergency Action Guidelines to restaurants.

These little yellow books are your resource for food safety responses in emergencies, including:

- Interruption of electrical service
- Interruption of water service
- Contaminated water supply (biological)
- Sewage back up
- Fire
- Flood



This guideline is available in English, Spanish, Chinese & Arabic!

If you don't have one at your establishment, download it from the [Michigan Department of Agriculture's website](#).

Or, contact Washtenaw County Environmental Services for a hard copy available already bound in English.

## Congratulations to the Following ServSafe Certified Managers!

The following people have completed the 16 hour ServSafe Manager Certification program through the Michigan State University Extension program and have passed the accompanying exam.

Congratulations!!

### **Ann Arbor Public Schools**

- Marilyn Suter
- Sue Symington

### **Barton Hills Country Club**

- Nina Lysloff-Brinker

### **Bearclaw Coffee**

- Peggy Horvath

### **Bistro Renaissance**

- Stephen Montesanto

### **BTB Burrito**

- Brent Hegwood

### **Calvary Bible Church**

- Mary Miller

### **Chelsea Community Hospital**

- Chris Lounsberry

### **Classic Pizza**

- Andy Bobo

### **Community Action Network**

- Linda McCallum
- Derrick Miller
- Erica Parker

### **Contempo Salon & Spa**

- Donald Shattock

### **Dairy Queen**

- Shelly Stricklen

### **Dibella's**

- Tony Ruvo

Gretchen Dreyer

### **Espresso Royale**

- Sarah Douglas
- Elizabeth Rzepka

### **Frank's Place**

- Jim Collins

### **Genesis—Temple Beth Emeth**

- Rhonda Simon
- Wally Tatana

### **German Park Recreation Club**

- Sheila Mueller

### **Girl Scouts of the Huron Valley Council**

- Jason Maddock

### **Huron Valley Tennis Club**

- Ronda Keedle

### **Jet's Pizza**

- Nick Woods

### **Lucky Kitchen**

- Jessica Hung
- Jenny Wu

### **Lifehouse Properties**

- Kera Tennyson

### **Linda's Diner**

- Linda Minor

### **Locavorious**

- Rena Basch

### **Macomb County MSUE**

- Eileen Haraminac

### **Paesano's**

- Kimberly Brant
- Dan Sutter

### **St. James Episcopal Church**

- Anne Piehl

### **St. Joe's**

- Josh Mahatzke

### **Saline Area Senior Council**

- Heather Schaare

### **Sheena Barnes BBQ Bones**

- Julius Green

### **Stonebridge Golf Club**

- Rob Snyder

### **Tim Horton's**

- Gennie Jones

### **University of Michigan**

- Sherbreia Cagins

### **Village of St. Joseph Mercy Hospital**

- Angela K. Weatherspoon

### **Washtenaw County Parks**

- Rhea Dreffs
- Gus Rosa

### **Wendy's**

- Phillip Adams
- Kim Bawiec
- Sandra Bemis
- Pamela Daniels
- Jennifer Grant
- Bill Harrison
- Eliezav Usacanga Hernandez
- Rebecca Killinger
- Andy Maiville
- Kevin W. Salisbury
- Octavia Vinston

# Allergens: What you need to know

The 2005 Food Code requires the person in charge to be able to describe foods identified as major food allergens and the symptoms that major food allergens could cause in a sensitive individual. Those allergens are:

- Milk
- Egg
- Fish
- Shellfish
- Tree Nuts (such as almonds, pecans or walnuts)
- Wheat
- Peanuts
- Soy

Symptoms of a reaction to a food allergy can include one or more of the following: a tingling sensation in the mouth, swelling of the tongue and throat, difficulty breathing, hives, vomiting, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, drop in blood pressure, loss of consciousness, and even death. Symptoms typically appear

within minutes to two hours after a person has eaten a food to which he or she is allergic.

The CDC estimates that food allergies cause 30,000 cases of anaphylaxis, 2,000 hospitalizations and 150 deaths annually.

To reduce the risk of illness via food allergy in your restaurant, make sure your staff are informed of the 8 major food allergens, and if they have a question from a customer, follow these helpful guidelines:

1. **Refer** the customer to the manager, person in charge or chef so that the question is handled appropriately.
2. **Review** the food allergy with the guest and check the ingredients to see if the item ordered contains the allergen.
3. **Remember** to check the preparation for potential cross contamination with the food allergen. For example, if a guest is allergic to fish, make sure the chicken they ordered is not fried in the same oil as the fish is.

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4. **Respond** to the guest & inform them of your findings. Because in today’s modern world, all food has been processed or handled by someone before it was delivered to your restaurant, you cannot guarantee the item the guest has ordered is free of the substance. You should inform the guest of the precautionary measures you have taken and let them make an informed decision as to whether or not they would like to order an item.



## Waiter, there’s a fly in my soup!



Late summer is the time that blowflies and greenbottle flies, commonly known as house flies, find their way into your restaurants. Besides being unsightly, house flies can spread illness, as their typical breeding areas damp organic material such as garbage and dead animals.

These insects typically breed outdoors, and come in through open doors, windows, and other unprotected areas. Often, they are attracted to the trash area and come in when a door is propped open for a delivery.

To minimize their entry, keep trash in sealed containers, such as trash cans with tight fitting lids or make sure that bags are tightly sealed inside a dumpster with a closed lid.

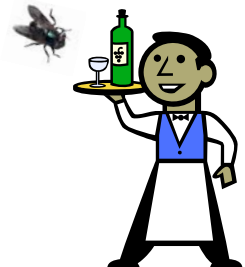
Screens and air curtains also help keep flies out of restaurants. Air curtains are powerful fans that fit above door frames and blow a strong “curtain” of air straight down. This air flow impedes the flies’ ability to enter your restaurant.

Once inside, the best method is to use sticky traps and light traps in areas that will not contaminate food. Having a trap near the back door in an area that is not over a food preparation table can help trap insects that do get inside.

Please remember that any insect sprays must be approved for use in a commercial kitchen. You can also contact your pest control professional for help on this matter.

Fruit flies and gnats are another

bothersome pest and their populations also tend to increase with the warmer weather. Diligent cleaning of your restaurant & removal of the food source & breeding areas can help keep populations under control. Nightly, take out empty bottles and cans, cover liquor bottle spouts, and clean bar areas thoroughly. Drains should be cleaned of organic matter using a stiff brush. Take out trash and don’t leave dirty dishes in the kitchen at night. Finally, seal up any cracks or small areas where pests may hide during the day. Regular cleaning and the help of a professional pest control company can help eliminate these pesky pests.



## Washtenaw County Environmental Services

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<http://foodsafety.ewashtenaw.org>



**World Class Service**

*Washtenaw County Environmental Services' mission is to enhance the safety of food, water, air and surroundings through education, regulation and advocacy in partnership with a knowledgeable industry and informed public. We provide regulatory oversight of food service establishments in accordance with state and federal mandates, investigate consumer complaints related to food service establishments, including complaints of foodborne illness, and continually strive to increase availability of food safety information to both the industry and public.*

If you have a suggestion for a topic in a future edition of this newsletter, please [email us](#) and let us know!

This email list was generated from the email listed on your food service license. You can subscribe or unsubscribe to these messages by visiting our [Food Safety Updates website](#).

## ServSafe Certification

Food safety training is a commitment, a mindset and a smart business practice for every restaurant and food service operation. ServSafe is a training program that can provide resources to help keep food safety an essential ingredient in every meal.



Every person. Every meal. Every day.™

This 16-hour certification program provides food managers with thorough training in all areas of food safety relevant to a food service establishment. Upon successful completion of an exam, managers will receive a certificate verifying that they are a certified ServSafe Food Protection Manager.

ServSafe was developed by the National Restaurant Association. It is taught by Michigan State University Extension staff at Washtenaw County's

Western Service Center in partnership with Washtenaw County Environmental Services. The course is taught each month as a 16-hour program. The fee for the course is \$200, which includes a course book, test, and lunch. Upcoming course dates include:

- September 23 & 25
- October 21 & 28
- November 13 & 20

Class size is limited, so please register early. A ServSafe Manager Certification is valid for 5 years, and meets the new Michigan Food Law Requirement of having a certified manager.

**Call Joan Miller at (734) 222-3956 to register for ServSafe today!**