

# CRACKING THE CODE: COMMON HEALTH CODE VIOLATIONS AND HOW TO PREVENT THEM

# 70%

OF DINERS WILL AVOID RESTAURANTS THAT HAVE A NEGATIVE HEALTH INSPECTION

NO MATTER HOW BIG OR SMALL, **HEALTH CODE VIOLATIONS CAN HAVE A SERIOUS IMPACT ON YOUR BUSINESS.**

A staggering 70% of diners will avoid restaurants that have recently received a negative health inspection. The good news is that most violations are entirely preventable. Check out this list of common health code violations to prepare for your next inspection and keep your guests safe and satisfied.



## PERSONAL HYGIENE

### Why it Matters

Good personal hygiene among staff is critical for reducing the spread of pathogens and maintaining a safe restaurant. When employees don't follow handwashing guidelines, wear dirty clothes, or show up to work sick, they put your entire operation at risk.

### How to Prevent a Violation

- Ensure employees wash their hands after:
  - o Using the restroom
  - o Leaving and returning to kitchen/prep areas
  - o Touching their face, hair, or clothing
  - o Eating, drinking, smoking, or chewing gum
  - o Clearing tables, busing dirty dishes, or taking out the trash
  - o Handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood
  - o Handling chemicals
- Make sure back-of-house staff is wearing clean clothes every day, aprons and gloves when necessary, and hair coverings
- Ask staff to remove jewelry such as rings or watches in food-prep areas
- Send employees displaying signs of illness home until they have fully recovered



## TIME AND TEMPERATURE

### Why it Matters

Certain foods become unsafe when they fall between the temperatures of 41° F and 135° F (known as the temperature danger zone) for an extended period. The longer food sits in this range, the higher the risk it has of harboring harmful bacteria.

### How to Prevent a Violation

- Keep hot foods at or above 135° F
- Keep cold at or below 41° F
- Record food temperatures regularly and keep a written record of when the temperatures were taken
- Limit the amount of time food is spent in the temperature danger zone



## CROSS-CONTAMINATION

### Why it Matters

Cross-contamination happens when pathogens are transferred from one food or surface to another, putting guests in harm. Apart from improper storage, cross-contamination can occur when food is mishandled during preparation or serving.

### How to Prevent a Violation

- Make sure all food handlers are trained and certified in food safety and allergen awareness
- Ensure all staff members follow good personal hygiene protocols
- Provide your kitchen staff with color-coded utensils and cutting boards
- Store chemicals in a designated area away from food
- Wash all fruits and vegetables before being served



## FOOD STORAGE

### Why it Matters

One of the most common reasons for a negative health inspection is improper food storage. Storing inventory incorrectly—especially raw and ready-to-eat foods—can lead to cross-contamination, which is one of the main contributors to food-borne illnesses.

### How to Prevent a Violation

- Separate all raw and ready-to-eat food items into their own designated areas OR store them vertically in the following order:
  - o Ready-to-eat food
  - o Seafood
  - o Whole cuts of beef and pork
  - o Ground meat and ground fish
  - o Whole and ground poultry
- Label foods with accurate use-by dates
- Use designated food-grade storage containers
- Perform cold-storage inspections nightly



## CLEANING AND SANITATION

### Why it Matters

While cleaning removes food and other dirt from a surface, sanitizing reduces bacteria on a surface to safe levels. Surfaces and equipment that aren't properly sanitized after coming in contact with food can grow dangerous bacteria. Sanitizing requires a careful mixture of chemicals in order to kill bacteria on the spot.

### How to Prevent a Violation

- Sanitize all surfaces that come in contact with food:
  - o Kitchen counters and prep stations
  - o Cutting boards
  - o Pans
  - o Knives
- Make sure all food prep surfaces are smooth and cleaned frequently
- Throw away damaged or worn cutting boards or utensils
- When sanitizing surfaces, utensils, or equipment, follow this process:
  - o Scrape or rinse away food
  - o Wash using an approved cleaning product
  - o Rinse using clean water
  - o Sanitize using an approved solution
  - o Allow surfaces, utensils, or equipment to air dry
- Wash away chemicals completely after sanitizing, or use a safe no-rinse solution



## USING THE RIGHT SANITIZERS

Part of staying compliant when sanitizing a kitchen is using the right chemical sanitizers. The most common sanitizers for foodservice are chlorine, iodine, and quaternary ammonium (quats). These are some common factors impacting sanitizer effectiveness:

- Concentration: A concentration that is too low won't effectively sanitize, while too high of a concentration can be toxic. Always mix sanitizers with the appropriate amount of water as listed on the instructions.
- Water temperature: Sanitizers are most effective in water that is between 55°F (13°C) and 120°F (49°C).
- Contact time: To effectively reduce bacteria to safe levels, sanitizers should remain in contact with food-contact surfaces for 10–30 seconds.
- pH: Sanitizers work better in more neutral environments.

When using sanitizers, follow the product instructions carefully to ensure safety and effectiveness. Learn more about approved sanitizers [here](#).



## STAYING INSPECTION-READY

The best way to avoid health code violations is to stay inspection-ready. Treat every day as a possible inspection day and download our **Self-Inspection Checklist** to ensure you're covering all your food safety bases.

Another essential component of staying inspection-ready is making sure employees are food-handler trained and up to date on food safety best practices. ServSafe is the number one choice across the country for comprehensive food safety training and certification, empowering restaurant employees to work safer.

Learn more at [foodsafetyfocus.com](https://foodsafetyfocus.com).