



The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System - Serving New Jersey Since 1983



NEWS RELEASE

Media Contacts:

Nancy Sergeant, SGW, 973-263-5471, nsergeant@sgw.com

Mary Appelmann, SGW, 973-263-5182, mappelmann@sgw.com

Alicia Gambino, MA, CHES, NJPIES Director of Public Education, 973-972-9280,
agambino@njpies.org

Would Your Kitchen Pass Restaurant Health Inspection? Follow Kitchen- and Food-Safety Tips and Food Storage Guidelines

Steven Marcus, Executive and Medical Director,
New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES) *Available for Interviews*

NEWARK, N.J. — December 1, 2010 — Think your kitchen is clean? It may not pass a restaurant health inspection test. One in seven people who participated in a self-assessment kitchen survey in Los Angeles County, Calif., would have failed the kind of inspection typically done in restaurants, reported the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).¹

The 57-question survey, administered by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH), was a voluntary self-inspection and education program to promote safer food hygiene practices in the home.² Of the 13,274 participants, 34% received an A rating, 27% a B rating, 25% a C rating and 14%, or about one in seven respondents, a failing mark.

“Most people think food poisoning comes from restaurants but that’s not the case,” said Steven Marcus, M.D., executive and medical director of the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES). “Experts believe that most incidents of food poisoning are caused by food prepared at home. If that’s the case, we all need to be more diligent about our home kitchens and how we handle our food.”

Food-borne illness, also known as food poisoning, results from the eating of food that is contaminated with harmful bacteria, viruses or other foreign material. Contamination is caused by

improper food handling and preparation practices. The symptoms of food-borne illness are flu-like and may include abdominal pain, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting and fever.

“If you are unsure whether a food might be unsafe to eat because of its handling or preparation, or if you or a family member fall victim to food poisoning, call us,” said Dr. Marcus. “The Poison Center is staffed by doctors, pharmacists and nurses 24 hours a day.”

How does your kitchen rank?

The LACDPH study questioned respondents on various aspects of food preparation and handling. Below are sample questions. Try them to see how your kitchen ranks.

- Do you have a properly working thermometer inside the refrigerator?
- Do you store raw meats below all other food in the refrigerator?
- Do you remove all jewelry from your hands before preparing food? Do you keep your fingernails trimmed?
- Are your kitchen shelves and cabinets clean and free from dust?
- Is the food in your refrigerator well-spaced so that cool air can circulate freely?
- When cooking big portions of food to serve later, do you rapidly cool it and store it in the refrigerator?

A response of “yes” is the correct answer for all questions listed above. NJPIES poison experts are available 24/7 to counsel you on these and other issues, and to explain the importance of this type of survey.

Tips for the home kitchen

To ensure that your kitchen and home-cooked meals don't pose a risk to your friends and family, the New Jersey Poison & Information System offers these tips.

Cleaning

- Sanitize a sponge or dishcloth by wetting it and then putting it into the microwave for one minute.
- The correct recipe for a sanitizing solution is one ounce of bleach in one gallon of water.
- Keep soap and/or sanitizer near the kitchen sink.
- Dry hands only on paper towels or a designated dish towel that is not used for any other purpose. Discard or replace towels after food preparation.
- Make sure your countertops and cutting boards are clean to the sight and touch, without chips, scratches, grooves or stains. Sanitize them before and after food preparation.
- Make sure your microwave oven is free of debris. Check both the cooking space and the oven door seals.
- Make sure your can opener is clean and free of debris.

Food safety

- Make sure the refrigerator is set below 40 degrees Fahrenheit.
- When preparing food, always start with clean hands and a clean preparation area.
- Wash surfaces often when working with meat, fish, poultry and dairy.
- Do not place cooked foods on surfaces that previously held uncooked foods.

- Cook all foods to proper temperatures. Use a meat thermometer when cooking meat or poultry.
- Purchase dairy products near the end of your shopping trip. They should not be left at room temperature any longer than needed, and never more than two hours.
- Remember to check the “best if used by” date or “sell by” date for food. When in doubt, throw it out.

Food storage during power outages

With large numbers of homes suffering from power outages, it also is important to be careful about food stored in refrigerators and freezers.

- During an outage, open refrigerators and freezers only when necessary.
- Place a refrigerator thermometer in the center of the middle shelf and check the temperature. If it is 45 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, discard meat, poultry, fish, dairy and egg products, soft cheese, cooked beans, cooked rice, cooked potatoes, cooked pasta, potato salad, custard and pudding.
- When power is restored, allow time for the refrigerator to cool below 40 degrees Fahrenheit before restocking.
- When in doubt, throw it out.

Call for more information

NJPIES urges medical professionals, parents, educators, caregivers and the general public to call the toll-free poison center hotline, **1-800-222-1222**, to learn more about food safety or any food-related poisoning emergency.

About NJPIES

As New Jersey’s only poison control center, the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System provides information on poison prevention and treatments. Chartered in 1983, NJPIES provides free consultation through telephone hotline services and the Web. Medical professionals such as physicians, registered nurses and pharmacists offer confidential advice regarding poison emergencies and provide information on poison prevention, drugs, food poisoning, animal bites and more. These specialists are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

NJPIES coordinates state poison education and research, and is designated as the regional poison center by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It tracks incidences of adverse reactions to food, drugs and vaccines in order to monitor potential public health issues and provide data to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A division of the Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health of the New Jersey Medical School of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, NJPIES has a state-of-the-art center located on the school’s Newark campus.

New Jersey residents seeking immediate information about treating poison emergencies, and those with any drug information questions, should call the multilingual toll-free hotline, **1-800-222-1222**, anytime. The hearing impaired may call **(973) 926-8008**. For more information, visit www.njpies.org or call **(973) 972-9280**.

About UMDNJ

The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey is the nation's largest freestanding public health sciences university, with more than 5,500 students attending. The state's three medical schools, a dental school, a graduate school of biomedical sciences, a school of health-related professions, a school of nursing and a school of public health are housed on five campuses — Newark, New Brunswick/Piscataway, Scotch Plains, Camden and Stratford. Annually, there are more than 2 million patient visits at UMDNJ facilities and faculty practices at the campuses. UMDNJ operates University Hospital, a level I trauma center in Newark, and University Behavioral HealthCare, a mental health and addiction services network.

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¹ Home kitchens can be source of food-borne illnesses

Tuesday, September 14, 2010, BY COLLEEN DISKIN, THE RECORD STAFF WRITER

http://www.northjersey.com/food_dining/102836984_Home_kitchens_can_cook_up_danger.html?c=y&page=1

**² Use of a Self-Assessment Questionnaire for Food Safety Education in the Home Kitchen --
- Los Angeles County, California, 2006—2008, Centers for Disease Control, September 3,
2010 / 59(34);1098-1101**

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5934a2.htm>