

**Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health, Environmental Health Division**

Environmental Health staff conduct food protection activities in both food service and retail food establishments. They also inspect lodging facilities, public swimming pools, manufactured home parks, youth camps, water supplies, and public health nuisances.

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**Environmental Health Division**  
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click on "Licensing & Inspection"

**"Name That Violation" Answer**  
An establishment cannot block a handwashing sink or use it for food prep.

**651-266-1199**  
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**thought for food** provides useful information to managers of food service establishments licensed by Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health.

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**Comments?**  
Contact Mindy Stepnick at 651-266-1174 or email mindy.stepnick@co.ramsey.mn.us.

# thought for food

For managers of food service establishments licensed by Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health

## Under the Microscope: NOROVIRUS



hours after exposure. It is found in the feces or vomit of infected people and research has shown it takes only a very small amount to make people sick. The amount of norovirus that fits on the head of a pin would be enough to infect over 1,000 people. A person who has "noro" can shed billions of norovirus particles and is most contagious when he or she is sick with the virus and during the first three days after recovery.

Food can become contaminated with "noro" when infected people (food handlers) have stool or vomit on their hands and fail to wash their hands after using the bathroom and then handle food. It is also spread when they touch contaminated surfaces (such as a doorknob) or objects and then touch their mouth or eat without washing their hands first. Ill restaurant workers are frequently the source of outbreaks when they use their bare hands to touch ready-to-eat foods such as fruits and vegetables or food that has been handled after being cooked. According to CDC, 1 in 5 restaurant employees works when experiencing vomiting and diarrhea. These employees will often work while ill for fear of losing their job or are concerned that the business is short staffed.

Norovirus can be prevented by not working when ill, and by practicing good personal hygiene. It is imperative that employees do not work when they are experiencing symptoms that

include either vomiting or diarrhea. The Minnesota Department of Health recommends people avoid preparing food for others for at least 3 days after they recover from the illness. Proper handwashing is also essential to preventing the spread of "noro." Employees should wash hands with warm soapy water for a minimum of 20 seconds and use a fingernail brush. In addition, food workers should not handle ready-to-eat foods with bare hands. The certified food manager should conduct regular training sessions and review proper handwashing procedure along with discussing the requirement for using single use gloves or utensils to provide a barrier between bare hands and ready-to-eat foods. Lastly, management should regularly review the employee illness policy and emphasize the importance of not working while ill.

**"Ground Round Restaurant in Winona County Closed After Norovirus Sickened at Least 30 People"**

**"89 Students at Emory University in Atlanta Sickened with Norovirus"**

**"600 People on a Royal Caribbean Cruise Ship Sickened with Norovirus"**

These stories were headlines in various publications in 2014. Norovirus is the leading cause of illness from contaminated food in the United States and the leading cause of foodborne illness outbreaks in Minnesota. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is estimated that norovirus causes 19-21 million illnesses and 570-800 deaths each year. "Noro" is a highly contagious virus that can make people sick with diarrhea, vomiting and stomach pain. Symptoms usually begin one to two days after ingesting the virus but it can appear as quickly as 12

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winter/spring 2015 topics

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# Ask a Sanitarian...

**Q:** What are the reporting requirements if an employee is ill or if a customer became ill after eating at my establishment?

**A:** The Minnesota Food Code requires every food employee to report any of the following symptoms to their manager or person-in-charge:

1. Any incident of diarrhea, vomiting, or jaundice (yellow skin or eye color), regardless of the cause of the symptoms, within the last 72 hours;
2. An open, infected wound so precautions can be taken to prevent food contamination;
3. Any of the following infections when diagnosed:
  - E. coli O157:H7
  - Salmonella
  - Shigella
  - Hepatitis A.

Each food establishment is required to notify Ramsey County Public Health of any of the following events:

- An employee with any of the infections listed above;
- A complaint from a customer who reports becoming ill with diarrhea or vomiting after eating at your establishment;
- A complaint from a customer who tests positive for E. coli O157:H7, Salmonella, Shigella, or Hepatitis A after eating at your establishment.

It is also important to direct any member of the public who believes they may have a foodborne illness to call the foodborne illness hotline at 1-877-FOOD-ILL (1-877-366-3455). The call helps the Minnesota Department of Health identify foodborne illness outbreaks in Minnesota and can prevent the spread of the illness to others. The Foodborne Illness Hotline is staffed from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday (not including holidays). The public can also email their illness report to: [health.foodill@state.mn.us](mailto:health.foodill@state.mn.us)

*If you have a question you would like to ask a sanitarian, please send an email to: [mindy.stepnick@co.ramsey.mn.us](mailto:mindy.stepnick@co.ramsey.mn.us)*

## Name That Violation

(see bottom of page 4 for answer)



Look at the picture above. Can you tell what this food establishment is doing wrong according to health codes? The answer can be found in the bottom left corner of page 4.

## Sign Up for Going Green Today

Ramsey County strives to create a healthy, safe environment for all people to live, work and play. Find out what we are doing to go green inside and out! Sign up for our Going Green Today e-newsletter, which is sent to your inbox every other month.

Go to [www.co.ramsey.mn.us](http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us) and click on e-subscribe in the left menu bar. From the subscription page, select Going Green Today under Health & Environment.

## Proper Handwashing Helps Prevent Foodborne Illness

Handwashing is one of the best preventive measures that food employees can take to reduce the transmission of foodborne illness to your customers. Ensure that your food workers wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds using soap and a nailbrush before they begin work and any time their hands become contaminated.

Handwashing is effective in controlling the spread of disease because it physically removes viruses and bacteria from your hands. Effective handwashing has been shown to provide a "two-log reduction" in viruses and bacteria. This means proper handwashing provides a 99 percent removal of virus and bacteria particles from your hands (i.e., from 100 particles down to 1 particle).

For handwashing to be effective, it is important that the handwash sinks in your establishment are properly stocked, accessible and located near each workstation. This can reduce the chances of spreading disease. Here are some common violations found at handwash sinks that can reduce the effectiveness of employee handwashing:

- Lack of soap, paper towels or a fingernail brush. Handwashing should be done for at least 20 seconds using soap and a fingernail brush, and drying with disposable towels.
- Using water less than 110°F. Warm water is more effective than cold water in removing the fatty soils encountered in kitchens. An adequate flow of warm water will cause soap to lather and aid in flushing soil and oils from the hands.
- Access to the sink is blocked. Storage in front of handwash sinks will restrict convenient access and make it less likely that employees will use that particular handwash sink.
- Using handwash sinks for purposes other than handwashing. Handwash sinks should be used for handwashing only.



Although handwashing is very effective in removing viruses and bacteria from your hands, a two-log reduction may not always be enough to prevent the spread of disease. Some illnesses can be transmitted at very low doses. For example, Norovirus can be spread by as few as 5-10 virus particles. Therefore,

it is important that employees stay home when they are sick, particularly if their symptoms include vomiting and diarrhea. Employees should also minimize bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat foods through the use of gloves or utensils.

## Food Manager Certification



### Food Manager Certification

Full Day Class • 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

This class is for uncertified food managers. Call 651-266-1199 for a registration form.

#### 2015 Certification Course Dates

May 13	June 10	Aug. 19
Sept. 16	Oct. 14	Nov. 11

### Food Manager Recertification

Four Hour Class • 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

This class is for food managers who were previously certified and need to be recertified. Call 651-266-1199 for a registration form.

#### 2015 Recertification Course Date

Sept. 15

### Food Manager Certification Exam Retests

Retests are available by request. Call 651-266-1199 and leave a message for a retest application.