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What to consider when processing, preparing and serving food in the holy month of Ramadan

By

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Everyone shops, prepares food for the holy month of Ramadan, that's why it's so important to follow the basics of food safety. Harmful bacteria that may be present in food can cause food borne illness when the food is eaten.

Food borne illness can affect anyone at any time, but certain people are more likely to get sick from food borne bacteria, and once they're sick, they face the risk of serious health problems, even death. Such at-risk people include:

People with chronic illnesses and weakened immune systems, pregnant women, young children, and older people. Also, underlying illnesses such as diabetes, some cancer treatments, and kidney disease may increase a person's risk of food borne illness.

Although infection, contamination, and cross-contamination, are factors likely to occur in food producing facilities, posing risk to consumers, food handlers and eventually affecting the quality of food, the following guidelines can be easily applied at the different stages of food production, starting from the food handlers and raw materials to the end product.

FOOD HANDLERS

- ❖ Ensure that food handlers are free from any communicable disease or disease-causing agents
- ❖ Food handlers should wear special clean clothes while handling food.
- ❖ Cooks should put on caps and nets to prevent hair falling into the food.
- ❖ Wash hands with hot soapy water before handling food.
- ❖ Hands should be washed every time they come into contact with raw materials or dirty surfaces.

RAW INGREDIENTS:

- ❖ Ensure the quality of raw ingredients _ cooking per se does not eliminate spoilage.
- ❖ Foods (e.g. bread, spices and seasonings) which don't go through a washing or cooking process should be sealed in such a way to prevent contamination from the surrounding environment.
- ❖ Serving food should be carried out with minimum hand contact. However, hands should be washed with soapy hot water all the time.
- ❖ Ready made foods should be washed with water, preferably using a detergent.
- ❖ Spices and seasonings should be prepared in such a way that they are used once. It is not advisable to use large cans which can be consumed by more than one individual for long period.

TEMPERATURE CONTROL:

- ❖ If required, foods should be heated instantly at a temperature of at least 70°C.
- ❖ Ready made foods such as pasteurized milk should be used in suitable size containers (e.g. 1/4 or 1/2 liter) so that they are consumed individually.
- ❖ Ready made foods should remain under good health conditions_ cooked or chilled_ and in sanitized areas away from human wastes. When transported, they should be kept in airtight containers.
- ❖ Refrigerated food should be kept at temperature of 4° C.

PREVENTION OF CROSS CONTAMINATION:

- ❖ When serving food, you should use large trays to ensure a minimum hand contact.
- ❖ Foods which are put on display should be kept out of reach of facility workers and customers to prevent contamination.
- ❖ Leftovers from previously served food should not be re-served to other customers, even if there are signs that the food has not been eaten at all.
- ❖ When transporting food, it has to be covered and should be carried in such away to ensure minimum contact with hands and surfaces.

PEST CONTROL

- ❖ Chemical should not be used to combat insects when preparing or serving food. Electric wire traps (for flying insects) and poisonous baits can be used instead and they should be put at the entrances of the facility

To fight bacteria that cause food borne illness, just follow these four steps to Food Safety (known as the 4 Cs of Food Safety):

- ❖ • **Cleanliness**. Wash your hands
- ❖ • **Cooking**. Cook food thoroughly
- ❖ **Cross-contamination**. Avoid mixing raw and cooked foods
- ❖ . **Cooling**. Keep cooked food cool, in a fridge below 5°C

USEFULL LINKS:

http://www.foodlink.org.uk/resources_imagebank.asp

<http://www.flyonthewall.com/FlyBroadcast/FSA/BacteriaBiteBusiness/>