



Flu Season Returns

Get your shot, stay healthy

As fall approaches, so does the cold and flu season. Both can keep you and your family home from school and work. The flu is a serious disease that can lead to a hospital visit or, in some cases, death. Last year 359 Snohomish County residents were hospitalized and 26, including 2 children, died from the flu.

We never know what flu season will bring, but we do know that a flu shot is the best defense against getting sick. **The Snohomish Health District recommends a flu shot every year for everyone 6 months of age and older.** Seniors, infants, pregnant women, children with special health care needs, and those with health problems like diabetes, lung or heart disease are more likely to get seriously sick from the flu. When more people get a flu shot, wash their hands often, and cover their coughs, it keeps them on the job and stops the flu from spreading to coworkers and customers.

Studies have shown that offering the flu vaccine onsite is a great way to ensure that employees are protected. Pharmacies are another good option for those with busy schedules. Most insurance plans cover flu shots at no cost as a preventive healthcare practice. Visit [Snohomish Health District's Flu page](#) for more information or use the [HealthMap Vaccine Finder](#) to find a pharmacy with flu vaccine in stock.

Hepatitis A and Food Workers

Since 2016, cases of hepatitis A have been increasing in the United States. The disease inflames the liver and causes illness that can last up to two months. Some people relapse and are sick for up to six months.

A number of these cases have been caused by contaminated food products and infected food handlers.

Food can come in contact with the hepatitis A virus while growing, being harvested and processed, during preparation or after cooking. Hepatitis A can even survive being frozen. The FDA website lists recent hepatitis A outbreaks from frozen tuna, frozen strawberries, and raw scallops.



The hepatitis A vaccine is a safe and effective way for food handlers to prevent getting and spreading the disease. Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist about vaccination. The protection will last a life time!

Find more information about hepatitis [on the Snohomish Health District website](#).

Prevent the Spread of Illness

We know that many people get sick each year from food. Working in food service, the goal is to prevent this as much as possible. The Washington State Department of Health has determined that many cases of illness could be prevented by three main things:

Proper handwashing

Washing hands the right way, for the right amount of time, will remove the germs that can be so harmful. Make sure that every employee is using soap and warm water and scrubbing their hands for 10-15 seconds each time they wash. They need to scrub all surfaces of each hand, including between their fingers.

No bare hand contact

Avoiding bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods will prevent the spread of germs from a food worker's hands to the food they are preparing. Make sure that every employee is using some type of barrier, such as gloves, utensils or deli tissue, when working with ready-to-eat foods.

Excluding ill workers

Removing or excluding workers when they are ill helps to keep the germs out of the establishment. Make sure that employees understand when and why they should stay home. Posting and going over the Snohomish Health District's "Restriction and Notification of Ill Food Workers" sign will inform employees of what is expected of them.

Standardization

This spring, the Health District Food Program began implementing an FDA-modeled evaluation tool designed to assess and promote greater uniformity of retail food inspections. This evaluation tool, known as Standardization, uses a rigorous and systematic procedure to confirm each field inspector can demonstrate a high level of knowledge, understanding, and application of the food code against a uniform system of measurement.



One of our team leads, Zach Christopher, is a Washington State Department of Health Standardization Officer, and will be standardizing the rest of the team. One aspect of standardizing the team involves joint inspections with the Standardization Officer. This means they will each perform an inspection at the same time and then compare their inspection reports. They are only allowed a few differences.

The standardization process is not meant to turn each inspector into a robot. There will always be a human element to an inspection. Each inspection has its own considerations. However, through standardization, the goal is to provide a more consistent focus on risk factors, and a more uniform application of both the food code and Snohomish Health District policies and procedures. Our goal is always to keep the public safe from foodborne illnesses and improve how we do that.



The Environmental Health Food Safety team was out at the Evergreen State Fair for opening day. They inspected over 70 food booths, rest rooms, handwashing stations, barns and the petting zoo to help keep the public safe.

Pathogen Profile: Norovirus

Norovirus is a highly contagious virus that can be spread through the vomit or diarrhea of an infected person. It can also be caused by raw or undercooked shellfish.

Norovirus spreads rapidly in small environments, such as within a home, dormitories, day care centers, and nursing homes. This is why it's often associated with cruise ships and can show up during the holiday season. Symptoms of Norovirus include diarrhea, projectile vomiting and stomach pain usually lasting for one or two days. Someone who has Norovirus can be contagious for up to two weeks after they have recovered.

Norovirus can be spread by infected individuals touching objects or surfaces, or by sharing or handling food. Someone who is infected should not work with food while they have symptoms and up to 3 days after recovery. Wash your hands well with soap and water, carefully wash fruits and vegetables and cook shellfish thoroughly before eating. During an outbreak, sanitize non-porous surfaces of the facility with a bleach solution of 3/4 cup bleach per gallon of cold water. Once that has dried, clean and sanitize again



using the normal strength of 1 tsp bleach per gallon of cold water. There is no medicine to take for Norovirus, but it is important to drink fluids to avoid dehydration.



Making Changes

Are you replacing equipment? Changing the layout of the kitchen? Adding a menu item?

If so, letting the Snohomish Health District know about those changes should be at the top of your to-do list. Any changes made to your establishment should be reported to your inspector prior to adding/removing/replacing equipment or adding to the menu. The District will determine if the changes require a remodel/revision plan review. The plan review helps to make sure the new equipment or menu items still meet the safety needs and permit status that was first approved.

Changes Coming for the Manager Certification Class



Due to the proposed food code changes coming in May 2020, the Snohomish Health District Manager Certification Class is currently under review. We plan to take this time to come up with a class that meets the needs of our customers and meets the new food code. We will be sending out more information on our new Certified Food Protection Manager Class options in the next newsletter. For questions, please contact Leah Tax at 425.339.8752 or ltax@snohd.org.



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