EHA Consulting Group, Inc.

Health Notes

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EHA shares America's grief and outrage over the cowardly attacks against our country. In both New York and Washington, we not only have offices and staff, but also many dear clients and friends. Our condolences and hopes especially go to those most closely affected.

GOD BLESS AMERICA

From the President Dr. Melvin N. Kramer

We are proud to announce the expansion of our services and capabilities to better serve our clients. We have adopted a new company name and opened additional offices in the New York Metro area and South Florida. We also welcome John A. Gasparine to our team of Environmental Health Consultants. Our 20-year tradition of quality and excellence continues!

The following articles cover current topics impacting your business. Please contact us for more details.

Inside This Issue

Shigellosis in the Spotlight

Shigellosis is an acute disease caused by the Shigella bacterium. Symptoms typically include bloody diarrhea, accompanied by fever and vomiting. This disease is highly communicable via the fecal-oral route. With a fatality rate as high as 20%, shigellosis causes about 600,000 deaths per year worldwide. Unfortunately, it shows no signs of disappearing. The City of Cincinnati, for example, recently made the headlines as its reported cases skyrocketed from 14 last year to over 320 thus far in 2001. The good news is that implementing a program of regular and proper hand washing practices - especially for day-care and foodservice workers - can effectively control shigellosis.

Mad Cow Update

In our last newsletter, we reported on growing concerns over the fatal human form of Mad Cow Disease (vCJD). Scientists believe that so far 106 people in Europe and 1 in Hong Kong have died from the disease. There remain no reported cases in the U.S. Scientists do not know how many people have been infected because the incubation period could exceed 30 years. 100,000 people could eventually become infected. The good news is that two drugs already on the market for other ailments show promise for the treatment of vCJD. The FDA has approved larger clinical trials and extended studies. British scientists also report the promise of new research that could lead to a treatment drug within about 5 years.

EHA Introduces Advanced Rapid Detection Test!

To better serve our clients with continuing professional food safety training, we have adopted the use of rapid-detection Pro-tect™ Swab Test Kits (manufactured by Biotrace, Inc. of Plainsboro, NJ). By this method we can accurately and instantly assess the levels of residual contaminants on food contact equipment and surfaces after "cleaning" has taken place. The swabs use a color-changing liquid medium that indicates sanitation levels based on an estimate of surface food protein residue - all within ten minutes! This test helps our consultants evaluate cleaning and sanitization processes. We use it as an educational tool to immediately provide our clients with hands-on task-oriented training. This tool also helps us evaluate equipment such as cutting boards and the need for replacement. During its first month of use by our inspectors, feedback by our clients has been excellent!

EHA Consulting Group, Inc.
7904 Starburst Drive
Baltimore, MD 21208-3033
Phone: 800-969-1441/410-484-9133
Fax: 410-484-9515
Email: ehacorporate@msn.com

We're on the web! www.ehagroup.com

Food Safety Science

Coliform Bacteria

Less than 100 MPN/gm. is the acceptable level for non-dairy, ready to eat foods!

What the levels mean...

Coliforms of varying levels may be found in raw foods indicating the presence of bacteria normally associated with fecal contamination. They are easily killed by HEAT! Therefore, an elevated coliform count can mean that the food was cross-contaminated prior to receiving or during or post preparation. Because coliforms are often present in produce items special consideration should be given to these types of foods when used as an ingredient in pasta, rice and protein salads. The blanching process - that incorporates immersion of vegetable products in boiling water for at least 1 minute - should sufficiently reduce or eliminate coliform levels.

FDA Addresses Egg Safety Guidelines

The FDA recently corrected false news reports that its Food Code prohibited serving sunny-side-up or over-easy eggs. The Code, however, does state that an advisory should be provided to consumers -- on menus, brochures or other written materials -- that there is an increased risk with eating undercooked eggs especially for those most vulnerable to foodborne illness. Foodservice establishments are further advised to continue to follow local and state health regulations, many of which apply the FDA Food Code. Relatedly, a new FDA rule took effect on September 4, 2001, stating that egg cartons sold in retail establishments must bear safe handling instructions to advise consumers about potential illness from Salmonella enteriditis.

Shell eggs are specifically listed as a Potentially Hazardous Food in the FDA Code. Special care should consequently be taken when receiving, storing and cooking. Fresh eggs should be received at an air temperature of 45°F (7°C) or lower in odorless, clean and unbroken shells. Fresh eggs should have firm high yolks and whites that cling to the yolk. Eggs must be stored immediately at 41°F (5°C) or lower and cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 145°F (63°C) for 15 seconds. Liquid, frozen and dehydrated eggs must be pasteurized as required by law and kept refrigerated or frozen at appropriate temperatures. **EHA strongly urges using only pasteurized eggs when serving undercooked egg dishes** (e.g., waffles, pancakes, Monte Cristo sandwiches, Caesar Salads and hollandaise and béarnaise sauces).

Genetically Altered Foods– What's all the Fuss?

When Gregor Mendel experimented on peas in the 19th century - the "genetic" modification of food began! From yield expected to consumer demands on size, color and taste, agriculture has not been the same since. Perhaps Mendel should not even be credited with this innovation given that the search has been on for beneficial characteristics in crops for thousands of years. In fact, almost every domesticated crop differs genetically from its "wild" form because of human interventionlong before biotechnology. In 1994, consumers widely accepted the "Flavr Savr" tomato, which was the first genetically engineered food to enter the food supply. It offered a longer vine life, slower ripening and better quality in the winter months. According to the USDA, 25% of corn and 50% of soybeans grown in the U.S. are bioengineered; and 66% of processed foods contain these and other bioengineered grain crops.

So why all the fuss? Fearing allergies, unknown long-term health effects and environmental issues - public alarm and opposition to these foods is in the forefront of national debate. The infamous recall of "Star Link" Corn, for example, involved a genetic modification to produce a toxin harmful to insects. Kraft Foods voluntary recalled its taco shells upon detection of this toxin, which the FDA termed as an "unapproved insecticide" resulting in adulteration under the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act. There will be labeling issues as consumers expect to be alerted to the presence of genetically altered foods. Other than contacting the specific processor, there is no other practical means to make this determination at this time.

The FDA reviews all new bioengineered foods and has thus far found no reason to suspect they pose a threat to public health. In this Brave New World of food safety and biotechnology, we expect the debate to continue and hope that there will be no adverse health effects.