

Legal Health and Safety

Beware of festive food poisonings

Carelessly prepared poultry accounts for 20 per cent of food poisoning outbreaks. Careful with that turkey...

ENJOYING A sumptuous meal is an integral part of the Christmas festivities – and for the hospitality industry it's also a great revenue earner that can act as a buffer during the leaner months which follow.

However, memorable meals don't appear on the table without a great deal of thought and forward planning going into the mix.

Food safety is the key 'ingredient', particularly as studies show that more than 20 per cent of food poisoning outbreaks are poultry-related – with most cases occurring during the month of December. So the kitchen is – as always – the place where rules and discipline are paramount to maintain the necessary standards of safety and hygiene.

So where to start? After a top-to-bottom clean-up to ensure the kitchen and storage areas are spick and span in readiness for the high volume of produce needed, place your order with the suppliers.

If the plan is to buy fresh poultry, it is important, too, to check the 'use-by' dates with the supplier. Then, if freezing, make sure to rotate stock, date it and highlight the use-by date.

If customers can be encouraged to pre-order their choice of meal, it makes the requisitioning of food so much easier.

With these tasks completed it is a good time to run through the menu with staff. While good kitchen hygiene should be second nature, it is worth highlighting any significant food safety issues such as thawing, safe keeping and cooking the products, and stressing the need for

extreme care with high-risk items such as turkey, shellfish sauces and gravies.

When thawing the turkey, always



Make sure there are no ice crystals left in the bird's cavity before cooking

Follow the suppliers' instructions. Thaw in a deep-sided container to prevent the juices or any other liquid from dripping onto other foods and always throw the liquid away. Test to be sure there are no ice crystals left in the bird's cavity and that the legs and thighs are soft and move easily.

Bear in mind that refrigerators should be maintained at a temperature of approximately five degrees – but certainly not higher. This is very important because most food poisoning organisms won't grow at temperatures below that level. And food

should leave the kitchen at a temperature of at least 70 degrees, while hot holding food should be kept at a temperature of 60 degrees for no longer than two hours. Cooling food from cooking should be done within 90 minutes, then the food should immediately be stored in temperature-controlled conditions.

Cooking tips

When cooking for more than 20 people it is often advisable to take and record small samples of all the foods served and then freeze them for

14 days in separate containers. But remember to then dispose of the trial samples. While on the subject of cooking, most experts agree that it is far better to cook the stuffing separately – particularly if it is meat-based – rather than in the turkey's cavity.

With all these steps taken, the scene is set for a wonderful Christmas dining experience. Bon appetit! ■

For more food safety information visit www.venners.com/food-safety-audits.asp



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Venners is the UK's largest independent licensed trade auditing company. Established in 1896, it has a wealth of experience in liquor and food stocktaking and

auditing, compliance audit, food safety, health & safety and inventory services. Among other things it helps large corporate businesses and individual operators to increase margins

and control their stock and gross profit. It offers a genuine national service using only its own employees. Pictured is food safety manager Stuart Knill.

Q&A

How can I make sure patio heaters are safe?

Q I use patio warmers in my beer garden during the cooler months and have just purchased some more second-hand ones. Is there anything I need to do/consider in terms of health and safety?

A Absolutely. Make sure they have been serviced and that you have a copy of the service that was undertaken. Take a copy and keep records. Make sure whoever has supplied you has also trained both you and any of your staff who may be involved in the safe use of these heaters. Ensure all gas cylinders are kept away from sources of heat and away from all combustible materials, preferably outside.

File under: 13 Health and Safety. November 17, 2008

Can customers keep the fire burning?

Q During the winter we generally keep the fire burning. Some of my patrons occasionally volunteer to help to do this. I'd prefer they didn't but sometimes my staff and I are too busy and they insist on helping out where they can. Do I need to consider any health and safety issues in regards to this?

A When the weather is cold there is a lot of appeal in maintaining a nice warm fireplace. It's always great to see people who consider their local as their second home and nearly always great to see people happy to help! However, I think you are better off making the time to do it yourselves and thus eliminating any potential problems and risks. Please remember to use a fireguard at all times that the fire is burning and to have all working chimneys swept during the summer.

File under: 13 Health and Safety. November 17, 2008

Who is responsible for COSHH assessment?

Q My new cleaning company has mentioned that I should undertake a Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) assessment of my small hotel. My old cleaning company always did this themselves. Who should take responsibility, them or me?

A Ultimately you are responsible. As you say some companies will provide a COSHH assessment as part of their service while others do not. At the very least your cleaning company should provide you with safety data sheets from which you can write a basic risk assessment or you may prefer to have us write a COSHH assessment for you and advise and train your staff in the safe use of these chemicals. It is also imperative you have all the correct PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) on site to enable staff to use these chemicals safely.

File under: 13 Health and Safety.

Avoid disaster with the decorations

THE COUNTDOWN to Christmas is under way and hotels, pubs and clubs the length and breadth of the country are putting up their decorations.

Due to their temporary nature decorations can increase the risk of accidents.

So it is worthwhile having a simple checklist to keep possible hazards to a minimum.

In a busy bar, lounge or dining area always be aware of the ever-present dangers of slips, trips and falls – particularly when there are cables, wires and Christmas trees in the vicinity.

Though Christmas lights make the tree the centre of attention, they can also present a huge risk.

To ensure complete safety be sure to have them thoroughly inspected and tested before they adorn the tree.

When plugging in the lights there is a good chance you will be using extension cables, so it is advisable to follow accepted safety rules and only use extension cables that have been pre-tested and ensure they do not

present a trip hazard. Remember, also, never to leave tree lights switched on when the premises are empty.

There's little doubt that a roaring fire adds to the atmosphere and general feeling of well-being – but it is essential that the flames be well guarded. Additionally, decorations and cards should never be placed above an open fire or near any other heat sources such as light fittings and electric fires.

A candle-lit dining table may look romantic. But if candles are allowed on site it is essential that they be treated with the same care as any other naked flame.

Finally, don't ever be tempted to have indoor fireworks – they could make your Christmas go off with a bang for all the wrong reasons!

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If you have a legal query write to: Legal Advice, The Publican, Ludgate House, 245 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 9UY



Christmas lights present a huge risk