

Dec. 4, 2006:

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Restaurants reminded that refrigeration change takes effect Jan. 1

Public health officials in the Oregon Department of Human Services are reminding restaurant owners of a new refrigeration requirement that reduces the risk of foodborne illness.

Starting Jan. 1, restaurants must hold cold foods at 41 degrees Fahrenheit or lower, said Eric Pippert, manager of the foodborne illness prevention program in the DHS Public Health Division.

Oregon adopted the U.S. Food and Drug Administration food safety standards in 2002 that reduced the holding temperature for cold foods from 45 F to 41 F. Restaurants were allowed a five-year phase-in period to allow time to upgrade any refrigeration equipment that could not meet the new standard.

“State and local public health, along with restaurants across the state, are taking this step to protect the public from potential foodborne illness,” said Pippert.

“The change doesn’t automatically mean that restaurant owners need to go out and purchase new refrigerators,” he said. “In many cases, commercially designed equipment that has been properly maintained should meet the requirement.”

Pippert noted that lower temperatures will help control pathogenic microorganisms such as *Listeria monocytogenes* that can grow in refrigerated food.

Listeriosis is a serious infection caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. The national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that approximately 2,500 illnesses and 500 deaths from Listeriosis occur nationally each year. The disease affects primarily pregnant women, newborns and adults with weakened immune systems. Infections during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage or stillbirth, premature delivery or infection of the newborn.

Approximately 45 states nationwide have adopted some version of the federal food code, which includes the 41 F requirement. DHS and county health departments have worked with the food industry to inform restaurateurs of the change and it is routinely mentioned during restaurant inspections, according to Pippert.

Oregon has more than 10,000 restaurants and 19,000 total food service establishments. The DHS Public Health Division helps protect the public's health by regulating the food service industry, overseeing the food handler card program, and providing technical assistance, training and education to restaurants and employees throughout the state.

Restaurant owners with questions about the refrigeration change can contact their local environmental health department or the DHS foodborne illness prevention program at 971-673-0185.

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