

Quarterly Scoop

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PHR1 Public Sanitation & Retail Food Safety

Texas Department of State Health Services
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Letter from the Editor

By Kassi Anthony

Great news! Our website has finally been updated. All of our previous newsletters from 2022 are now archived at [Public Health Region 1 Publications | Texas DSHS](#). Also, many of our usual program links that we use have been changed with the new website update, so please refer to our [Links & Contacts](#) page for the updated links.

Over this last quarter, we have implemented a new process for filing complaints with our program in Region 1 to prevent you reaching a voicemail and for proper data collection. There will be a link provided on the [Public Health Region 1 Public Sanitation and Retail Food Safety Page | Texas DSHS](#) under the “Program-related links” section at the bottom. We ask you to please be patient as the inspectors work out any bugs while using this new system. Feel free to let me know if you see any areas for improvement, as well.

Looking forward, inspectors will be heavily focused on completing all 2nd semester school cafeteria inspections. We have speaking engagements scheduled so far at Morton High School and Texas Tech University. If your community/facility has needs or opportunities for food safety outreach of any kind, please contact me [here](#).

As always, we would love to hear any feedback from you on this newsletter. Topics for upcoming issues are welcome. Just reply to your inspector or me on this [email](#).

Trending Violations*:

- Date Marking
- Employee Health Policy
- Food Contact Surfaces

*see pages 3-4 for additional info.

Good to Know!

By Mayra Vargas & Brittiany Bowling

What is an Allergy? (M. Vargas)

Allergies are a false alarm of a body's immune system. Immune systems identify things that are harmful, like bacteria or toxins. But the immune system can accidentally label harmless things, like pollen or certain foods, as dangerous. When the immune system finds these things, it will react by releasing chemicals like histamine, which cause varying symptoms. Reactions can vary by person and allergy.

Food allergies can be unpredictable.

Why are Food Allergies So Dangerous?

Food allergies can be unpredictable. People react differently to food allergies. Some may get a rash or a sore throat, while others can experience vomiting or cramping. Even if in the past someone has mild allergic reactions, it can still turn deadly.

The worst kind of allergic reaction is called anaphylaxis, which can lead to anaphylactic shock. Anaphylaxis affects the entire body and includes a drop in blood pressure, hives, itching, wheezing, tightness in the throat, and tingling. These symptoms ultimately lead to an inability to breathe properly, which could result in death. If you ever experience any of these symptoms, it is crucial to seek medical attention right away or dial 9-1-1.

The 9 Major Food Allergens

- | | | |
|----------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. Milk | 4. Soybeans | 7. Peanuts |
| 2. Wheat | 5. Fish | 8. Tree Nuts |
| 3. Eggs | 6. Shellfish | 9. Sesame |

([FDA Food Code 2017](#) , pp. 559-562 Annex 4 §3-602.11 Food Labeling, [Food Allergies | FDA](#), [Food Allergies | Healthy Schools | CDC](#))

How to Properly Thaw Fish (B. Bowling)

We've all seen frozen fish wrapped in individual pieces in a vacuum sealed package. This is a common way to purchase fish and is convenient for preparation. However, did you know that many of these vacuum sealed fish must be thawed properly to prevent foodborne illness?

Fish are natural carriers of *Clostridium botulinum*, commonly known as *C. bot*, which causes botulism. *C. botulinum* naturally



occurs in soil, sediment in bodies of water, and is found in the intestinal tracts of fish. *C. botulinum* is a bacterium that produces a neurotoxin that, when ingested, causes severe food poisoning characterized by double vision, paralysis, and occasionally death. *C. botulinum* carried by fish grows at 38°F and is not destroyed during cooking. *C. botulinum* is an anerobic bacterium that grows best in an environment with little to no oxygen.

Fish that is wrapped in vacuum sealed or reduced oxygen packaged (ROP) removes all oxygen from the packaged fish. When the fish is thawed in the packaging, it becomes the perfect environment for *C. botulinum* to grow due to the temperature rising and the lack of oxygen within the packaging.

How Should You Thaw the Fish Safely?

Read the labels! The fish will be labeled with instructions on how to safely thaw the fish. This will be printed on each individual piece of fish, and/or it will be on the box.

The Food Code does require that ROP fish be completely removed from the package prior to thawing. This prevents the fish from being thawed in an environment that allows for the growth of *C. botulinum*.

Why...?

By Melissa Hardin, Lindsey Eudey, & Leslie Morgan

...Date Marking (M. Hardin)

Refrigeration prevents food from becoming a hazard by significantly slowing the growth of most microbes. The growth of some bacteria, such as *Listeria monocytogenes*, is significantly slowed but not stopped by refrigeration. Over a certain timeframe, bacteria, such as *L. monocytogenes*, can multiply, increasing the risk to public health in certain ready-to-eat foods.

Based on a growth curve for *L. monocytogenes*, ready-to-eat, time/temperature control for safety (TCS) food may be kept at 41°F or below for a total of 7 days. Food which is prepared and held, or prepared, frozen, and thawed must ensure its safety based on the total amount of time it was held at refrigeration and the opportunity for *L. monocytogenes* to multiply. This can be achieved with proper date marking before and after freezing while the product is thawed and held at 41°F or below. Therefore, TCS refrigerated foods must be consumed, sold, or discarded by the expiration date to prevent listeriosis, the illness caused by *L. monocytogenes*.

...Employee Health Policy (L. Eudey)

One of the most important facets of Food Safety in your business is having an **Employee Health Policy**. It is the role of the Person-in-Charge to ensure that employees understand how diseases can be passed along through food and what illnesses pose a threat. This can be anything from symptoms of sore throat and fever to confirmed salmonellosis.

To make sure that conversation happens, businesses must have a way to



“There is no sincerer love
than the love of food.”

- George Bernard

prove that they have spoken to their employees on the importance of reporting certain illnesses. This could include training documentation from New Employee Orientation or having an employee health policy that is signed by the employee. An inspector may ask to see these records upon inspection.

The Texas Department of State Health services provides an [employee reporting agreement](#) that you can use in your facility. You simply go through the form with your employee and then both sign the form. It can be placed in a file to verify that employees have been trained.

Links & Contacts

[Region 1 - Retail Foods Contact Info](#)

[Texas Interactive Jurisdictional Map](#)

[Retail Food Establishments | Texas DSHS](#)

[Starting a New Retail Food Establishment in Texas](#)

[CFM Examination Providers | Texas DSHS](#)

[Accredited Food Handler Internet \(Online\) Training Programs | Texas DSHS](#)

[Cottage Food Production Operations](#)

[Youth Camp Program - Home](#)

[Public Swimming Pools and Spas - Home](#)

...Food Contact Surfaces (L. Morgan)

All food contact surfaces should be smooth and easily cleanable. Cracks and crevasses can provide harborage conditions for bacteria to hide from sanitizer, which can grow and cause illness or death.

Burnt or broken plastic containers or utensils should be replaced. Knives that are chipped or have broken tips should be sharpened or discarded. Cutting boards that have deep grooves should be planed or replaced. Replacing heavily used food contact surfaces is a part of operating costs, so be sure to add it to your budget!



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