The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has developed this Employee Health and Personal Hygiene Handbook to encourage practices and behaviors that can help prevent food employees from spreading viruses and bacteria to food. It provides information in a question-and-answer format that food establishment management and food employees can use to prevent the spread of disease. This handbook also provides easy reference to forms and tables that food establishments and the public health community may find useful when training staff and addressing employee health and hygiene matters. The information in this handbook is taken from those provisions in the 2005 FDA Food Code and its Supplement aimed at preventing ill food employees from transmitting disease.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and FDA cite five highly infective pathogens that can easily be transmitted by food workers and cause severe illness. These five foodborne pathogens, also known as the 'Big 5,' include Norovirus, the Hepatitis A virus, Salmonella Typhi, Shigella spp., and Escherichia coli (E.coli) O157:H7 or other Enterohemorrhagic or Shiga toxin-producing E. coli. Other, less infectious pathogens that can also be transmitted by food employees to consumers through contaminated food include Staphylococcus aureus, Salmonella spp., and Streptococcus pyogenes.

This handbook highlights a combination of three interventions that can be effective in prevention of the transmission of foodborne viruses and bacteria in food establishments. These interventions include: (a) restricting or excluding ill food employees from working with food; (b) using proper handwashing procedures; and (c) eliminating bare hand contact with foods that are ready-to-eat (RTE). Concurrent use of each intervention will help prevent the transmission of viruses, bacteria, and protozoan oocysts from food employees to consumers through contaminated food.

Proper management of a food establishment involves ensuring that food employees do not work when they are ill and having procedures for identifying employees who may transmit foodborne pathogens to food, other employees, and customers.

Management must ensure that food employees and "conditional" hires alike are aware of the reporting requirements for foodborne illness symptoms and diagnoses. When a food employee or conditional food employee reports either an exposure to, symptoms of, or a diagnosis with foodborne illness, the person in charge (PIC) must take action to prevent the transmission of foodborne bacteria and/or viruses from the infected food employee to the food. The PIC must understand the requirements for restricting, excluding, and reinstating food employees.

A correlation between the severity of a food employee's clinical illness and the level of exclusion and restriction required to eliminate the risk has been established. These levels were created to protect public health while avoiding unnecessary disruption to the employee schedule and the retail establishment's operation.

Proper handwashing reduces the spread of fecal-oral pathogens from the hands of a food employee to foods. Handwashing can also help reduce the transmission of other pathogens from environmental sources. Effective handwashing includes scrubbing, rinsing, and complete drying of hands and is essential for minimizing the likelihood of cross-contamination. The fingernails and surrounding areas are often the most contaminated parts of the hand and are also the most difficult part of the hand to get clean. Every stage of handwashing is equally important and has an effect in reducing contamination of the hands.

Handwashing alone might not always successfully remove pathogens from heavily contaminated hands, and infected food employees may not always be identified and removed from food preparation activities.

"No Bare Hand Contact" is the practice of preventing direct contact with bare hands while handling RTE foods. This practice provides a secondary protection against the contamination of foods that do not require further cooking with microbial pathogens from the hands of ill food employees.

The 2005 FDA Food Code recognizes the increased risks of foodborne illness in highly susceptible populations (HSPs) such as the very young, older adults, and those with compromised immune systems. Food establishments in health care; assisted living, child or adult day care, hospitals, nursing homes, nursery schools, and senior citizen centers are required to take additional precautions to prevent the transmission of foodborne illness.

For additional information about food safety, employee health and hygiene, and prevention of foodborne illness, go to the [FDA/Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition’s (CFSAN’s) Retail Food web page](http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/default.htm).

**SOURCE:**  
Adapted from the 2005 FDA Food Code and its Supplement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Food and Drug Administration

([FDA 2005 Food Code](http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/ucm2016793.htm))

([*Supplement to the 2005 Food Code*](http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/ucm124080.htm))