

# Taking Action to Build Food-Safe Schools

## Action Sheet

## Employee Health and Personal Hygiene

**F**oodborne illness (also known as food poisoning or foodborne disease) is any illness that results from eating contaminated food. The CDC estimates that each year roughly 1 in 6 Americans (or 48 million people) gets sick from eating contaminated food.

Bacteria and viruses are the most common causes of foodborne illness. School nutrition employees can transfer bacteria and viruses from their hands to the food that they prepare. To prevent this, school nutrition employees should not work when they are sick, always wash their hands before preparing food, and use gloves or utensils when handling ready-to-eat food. It is your responsibility to educate and train school nutrition employees in these practices and to take action to prevent employees from contaminating food.

### Food-Safe Schools Action Steps and Resources

1. Develop and implement a written policy or SOP that:
  - a. Requires employees to report certain diagnosed illnesses and symptoms of illness, and
  - b. Restricts or excludes ill employees from preparing or serving food, and handling food contact surfaces.
2. Develop and implement a written policy or SOP that requires employees to properly wash their hands at all appropriate times, such as before handling ready-to-eat food.
3. Develop and implement a written policy or SOP that requires employees to use gloves or other suitable utensils when handling ready-to-eat food.
  - The USDA FNS and NFSMI have developed Employee Health and Personal Hygiene

resources that highlight best practices for child nutrition employees to use to prevent spreading pathogens that can cause foodborne illnesses.

[www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=430](http://www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=430)

- *The Stomach Bug Book: What School Employees Need to Know* is a booklet that explains what school employees need to know about stomach illnesses at school. Available in both English and Spanish, it speaks to school nutrition workers, nurses, custodians, teachers, para-educators, education assistants, bus drivers, and school secretaries.  
[www.neahin.org/educator-resources/stomach-bug-book-english.html](http://www.neahin.org/educator-resources/stomach-bug-book-english.html)
- For more information on the CDC estimates of foodborne illness, see *CDC Vital Signs*.  
[www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/foodsafety](http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/foodsafety). ■

A school nutrition employee spent the weekend suffering with vomiting and diarrhea, but, feeling a little better, came to work the following Monday. Working with bare hands, she chopped lettuce to be served for lunch. Dozens of students and teachers became ill the next day. The local health department investigation traced the illnesses to the food handled by the ill employee.