

AMY'S FOOD SAFETY SPOTLIGHT

May 2025



UPCOMING SERVSAFE® CLASSES

May 12th – Louisville

June 17th – Louisville

June 30th – Louisville

July 14th – Louisville

August 5th – Louisville

August 18th - Louisville

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Sporting Clay's Tournament

June 9th, Jefferson Gun Club

Register at [Kyra.org/Events](https://kyra.org/events)

AMY'S FOOD SAFETY SCOOP

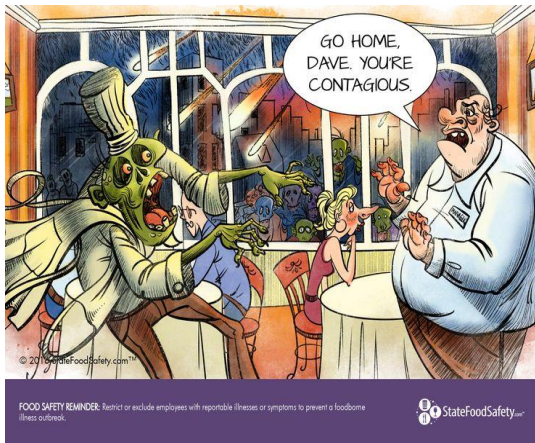
Food Safety – Strict sick leave policy¹

According to the CDC 48 million people get sick, 128,000 people are hospitalized, and 3000 people die from foodborne illness each year.

As many as 40% of these foodborne illness outbreaks are caused through contamination by a restaurant employee who is sick. Data collected by CDC's National Environmental Assessment Reporting System from 25 state and local health departments from 2017 to 2019 showed a total of 800 foodborne illness outbreaks associated with 875 retail food establishments (which include restaurants, groceries, and other food service outlets). According to the report, the common denominator in 320 of these outbreaks, was an infectious employee. Norovirus, the most common cause of foodborne illness, was confirmed or suspected in 47% of the outbreaks. Salmonella was the second most common cause, accounting for just under 19% of cases.

The simple solution would seem to be a strict (and enforceable) sick leave policy. However, three other studies by the Environmental Health Specialists Network showed gaps in the way restaurants manage sick workers.

- Restaurants need a written sick policy, and those policies need to list symptoms that should keep employees from working.
- Employees and managers work when sick for a variety of reasons. Sick leave policies need to address those reasons when possible.
- Managers let sick employees decide whether to work. They should be more proactive in determining if an employee has symptoms that could cause a foodborne illness.
- Restaurants typically scramble when trying to replace a sick employee. Managers need to take a more proactive approach to scheduling.



The 2022 FDA Food Code is a good place to start when adopting or updating a written sick leave policy. Section 2-2, “Employee Health,” outlines the criteria, including symptoms and specific diagnoses, that would prevent an employee from handling food and/or prep equipment, or even coming to work. For example, an employee with a cough or runny nose should be restricted from working with exposed food, utensils and equipment. An employee experiencing vomiting, diarrhea or jaundice should not come to work at all until cleared by a health practitioner.

A written sick leave policy will protect your staff, your customers and your restaurant only if it’s enforced. However, managers and employees shouldn’t think of it as punishment, but as part and parcel of your food safety program, one designed to prevent outbreaks and protect everyone’s health and livelihoods.

Research has shown that implementing a policy and managing sick employees is more effective and simpler when you put these procedures in place:

- Managers proactively ask employees who call in sick to describe their symptoms and decide together with employees whether it’s safe to work.
- Restaurants clearly communicate to all employees, including managers, that calling out sick or taking sick leave will not result in loss of their jobs.
- Restaurants also clearly communicate to all employees the importance of calling as soon as possible if they are sick to leave enough time cover the shift so the restaurant can still operate effectively.

No one likes to get sick, but a clear, strong sick leave policy will help ensure the health of your staff, customers and business.

To become more knowledgeable in this area and other food safety risk factors, schedule your team for a ServSafe® class with the KRA.

¹National Restaurant Association “Strict sick leave policy is critical to your operation’s food safety”

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