EFFECTIVENESS OF FOOD SAFETY INTERVENTIONS

Public Health Mandate  Public Health Units in Ontario are responsible for reducing morbidity and mortality associated with foodborne diseases under the Food Safety Standard. Public health staff must reduce the incidence of foodborne illness by assessing all food premises annually to determine their risk status, inspecting all food premises at least once per year (dependent on risk status), ensuring that food handling training courses are provided to food handlers in high and medium risk food premises, and providing food safety information to the community.

Background  Foodborne diseases are a significant cause of morbidity in Ontario with an estimated 280 outbreaks (approximately 70 per year) affecting 3,057 individuals (765 per year) for the period 1993 to 1996. It is generally felt these numbers represents only a fraction of the problem.

Issue  Public health staff must ensure that food handlers, both commercial and general public, are aware of effective food safety practices for the reduction of the presence and transmission of infectious diseases via food.

Finding the Answers  A systematic search of twenty electronic databases, reference lists and key informants produced fifty-five relevant studies of which seven were found to have sufficient quality to provide evidence.
What is the Evidence? The following interventions were found to be successful in promoting food safety:

- three of the five interventions promoting food handler training/certification were found to be effective in enhancing food safety knowledge and behaviour among food handlers.
- one of the three studies interventions promoting routine inspection were found to be effective in enhancing inspection compliance.

Implications for Practice and Research

Practice:
1. Public health staff provide, facilitate or promote food handler training/certification to food handlers.
2. Public health departments provide routine inspections of restaurants.

Research:
1. Methodologically rigorous evaluation research should be undertaken in Ontario to assess the effectiveness of diverse health promotion and protection interventions for enhancing food safety interventions.
2. Particular attention should be directed to assessing the effectiveness of any food safety intervention.
3. The scope of evaluation research should be expanded to include a larger variety of food safety interventions. Areas to be examined should also include evaluation research on regulatory strategies (issuing of tickets/orders/closures) and inspection disclosures in various formats and their impact on compliance with standards.

Source of Information


Summarized by

V. Mann, Ph.D., Research Associate, Public Health Research, Education and Development (PHRED) Partnership, Kingston, Frontenac, and Lennox & Addington Health Unit

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What is the evidence?
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- one of three interventions promoting routine inspection were found to be effective in enhancing inspection compliance.
Implications

- That public health staff use the above interventions to enhance food safety practices and policies.
- That evaluation research be performed on current public health food safety promotion and protection interventions to determine the effectiveness of enhancing prevention and control practices.

Source of Information


Summarized by

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