Employee Health Policy

So, maybe you've been running restaurants for twenty years. Or maybe you just graduated from a prestigious culinary school. You know what you're doing. So why did you still get an employee health violation?

Maybe it's time to create an employee health policy, so you can ensure that your employees know when they should not be working, what symptoms are critical to understand and what to do if something isn't right.

First of all, what is a policy and how do you create an employee health policy for your food establishment?

> *A policy is a defined set of actions that minimize food safety risks. Although some small food establishments may have verbal policies, it is best to write your policies down.*

Here are the key steps to consider when developing any policy:

- **Include the key people at the table**

- **Identify the most important steps in your processes**

- **Ensure that your policy includes corrective actions**

- **Revise the policy based on problems that arise, or as your food processes change**

Let's look at each of these steps more closely.

When writing your policy, make sure you are including the key people in your establishment, and also consider which staff members may be involved in each step.

Here are common operations in a kitchen. Where could an employee health issue arise in each of these steps?

Receiving	**Storage**	**Preparation**
Cooking	**Hot/Cold Holding**	**Cooling**
Reheating	**Assembly**	**Service to Customers**

The answer is all of them could potentially result in contamination of food by an ill employee and in turn spreading pathogens to your customers. Ill employees should not work in any of these areas.

Ask these questions for each of these operations:

Who is responsible?
Who monitors employee attendance and condition while working?

What needs to happen?
Employees shall be calling in when they are sick and specifically have the symptoms of diarrhea, vomiting, jaundice, or have been diagnosed with any of the Big 6 pathogens. Managers shall be restricting or excluding employees with key symptoms or diagnoses.

When does it take place?
When do employees report to work? Are employees conditions being reviewed when they report to work? During shift changes? While working?

Where does it occur?
Are employees taking an unusual number of restroom breaks?

How is this achieved?
Employees should be encouraged to disclose when they are sick. Management should try to accommodate shift changes to further encourage the correct behaviors. Management should observe employees when they report to work and monitor their condition while working. Work restrictions and exclusions should be made according to symptoms or diagnoses observed.

As you review these key operational steps, consider whether it would make sense in your business model to write several policies for employee health. For example, you might write separate policies for symptom identification/ calling in sick and work schedule accommodations.

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Now for the corrective actions. This is the "what if…" step. What if something goes wrong? Your policy should state what actions are taken if the correct procedures are not followed. You can include a space for writing in corrective actions on your logs.

But don't stop here! Your employee health policy is a living document, and will change over time. When you discover areas of non-compliance in your establishment, use them as opportunities to improve, and return to your policy to incorporate the changes. In this way, you will continue to improve.

To summarize, here are the key steps to consider with any policy:

- **Include the key people at the table**

- **Identify the most important steps in your processes**

- **Check that your policy answers the questions: who, what, when, where, why and how**

- **Ensure that your policy includes corrective actions**

- **Revise the policy based on problems that arise, or as your food processes change**

Remember, if you don't train your employees on your employee health policy, it won't do much to help your establishment. So check out the next document, a Manager's Guide to training your employees.

A Retail Food Service Manager's Guide

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