

'Drink' Food Safety? Yes, Absolutely! For Real

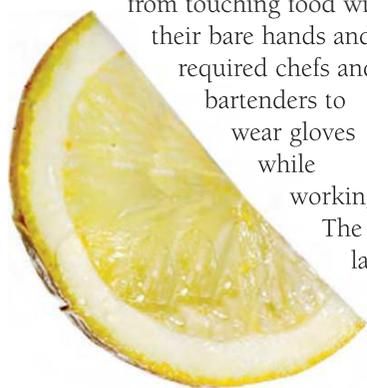
by Juliet Bodinetz

Many years ago, when I was a restaurant server and bartender, I would be annoyed by customers asking me for lemon in their water. It was a new trend then. If I forgot to add the lemon automatically, I would be rushing back to get slices, sometimes having to get even more when another customer at the table would request lemon, too. Nowadays, however, the story has changed. Savvy customers are requesting water with "no lemons, please." Why? They've read reports of contaminants on lemon wedges as a result of servers' dirty hands or the lemons not being washed at all.

To be honest, I've been teaching food safety for a long time now, but it's been only about eight years since I actually started to wash lemons myself. I now ask my students if they wash their lemons and limes. Most of them answer "no." That's the point — you have to wash all produce whether it's to be eaten in a dish or in a drink as a garnish. Even pineapples! Food safety has to be practiced in every step in the flow of the food, and this applies to your drinks, too.

California made a change in its health code about four years ago that banned restaurant workers from touching food with their bare hands and required chefs and bartenders to wear gloves while working.

The law



was repealed after just a few months due to overwhelming opposition from the restaurant industry. I've never been a big advocate of wearing gloves either, unless it's a hospital or medical office to avoid contamination from blood or other

pathogens. My thinking is that in a food business, gloves can give workers a false sense of security because they are less aware of what they touch. I recommend instead that servers and bartenders regularly — and thoroughly — wash their hands!

So, whether it's the server serving an iced tea, soda, or plain glass of water or the bartender creating the most complicated delicious concoction, food safety rules need to apply during both drink preparation and service. The four leading safety factors include:

To Control Time and Temperature:

- As we always say, **BUY a thermometer!**
- When holding or displaying food, discard it after four hours if the temperature measures inside the "Temperature Danger Zone" (41°F - 135°F).
- Keep cut fruit and garnishes, dairy, and fruit juices on ice or under refrigeration whenever possible.
- Display smaller quantities of food and replenish from refrigerated stocks as needed.

To Avoid Contamination/Cross Contamination:

- Clean hands! Wash your hands when dirty and before touching a new food, changing food handling tasks, or after tasting food with your fingers..
- Wash ALL produce before

cutting it; make sure all surfaces that touch food are clean and sanitized.

- NEVER use your hands to serve ice! Don't put the same ice in drinks that was used to keep food or drinks cold in a cooler.
- Keep drink garnishes covered as much as possible to avoid germ-carrying insects.
- Use small tongs or toothpicks to pick up garnishes; change or clean/ sanitize tongs or serving spoons as least every four hours.
- Don't add new garnishes to old garnishes.



Practice Proper Personal Hygiene:

Did I mention, keep washing your hands?!

- After touching money
- After clearing dirty glasses and before making a new drink
- After touching chemicals to sanitize a counter or wash glassware
- If you do wear gloves to make drinks, remember they are not a substitute for washing hands and must be changed for a fresh pair after washing hands. Don't blow into them to make it easier to put them on.
- Don't come to work sick, especially with stomach illnesses.
- **PLEASE DON'T** grab drink

glasses — ever — from the rim. My biggest pet peeve!!! Keep glasses stored with the rims down.

Proper cleaning and sanitizing:

- Wipe the bar clean with a sanitizing cloth, especially after a patron leaves...and definitely at the end of the night!
- Clean and sanitize knives and cutting boards before cutting any new garnish.
- Clean and sanitize glassware properly.
- Test your sanitizer solution's effectiveness regularly and change it out as directed.
- Wash and clear soda machines and beer lines. No one likes doing this, but it's necessary.
- Clean and sanitize garnish holders and throw out unused garnishes at the end of the night!
- Avoid fruit flies by keeping the drains clean.
- On a regular basis, empty ice machines and clean and sanitize them.

Your customers do watch you and appreciate when they see you doing the right thing. Keeping customers safe can pay off big in reputation and return!

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