



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SECTION

EHS Circular Letter #2009-48

To: Local Directors of Health  
Chief Sanitarians  
Certified Food Inspectors

From: Tracey Weeks, MS, RS, Food Protection Program

Date: August 10, 2009

Subject: Connecticut Ill Food Worker Educational Campaign



Connecticut is one of nine states involved with the CDC funded Environmental Health Specialist Network (EHSNet). This collaborative research project links environmental health specialists from nine participating states with staff from the CDC, USDA, and the FDA with the purpose of translating findings from research projects into improved foodborne disease prevention efforts.

Lisa Bushnell, Connecticut's EHSNet Specialist, has developed a Health Impact Study with a primary objective of decreasing the occurrence of restaurant associated norovirus outbreaks potentially caused by food workers working while symptomatic with vomiting or diarrhea.

Lisa has collaborated with a workgroup of representatives from 10 local health departments to develop an educational campaign focused on increasing the knowledge of food workers and managers regarding the symptoms that are most often linked to the spread of foodborne diseases. The CT Ill Food Worker Workgroup has developed materials that include 2 laminated 11" x 17" posters, (one geared toward the food worker and one for the Qualified Food Operator/manager), a pamphlet geared toward upper level management, and a Talking Point Guide for distributors of the materials. The materials were developed to: inform food workers of the need to report illness; assist management in promoting open communication with food workers; provide a resource for additional information on employee health policies; increase reporting of illness by food workers to management; and increase the required reporting of ill food workers by management to the local health department. The materials are available in English, Spanish, and Chinese.

During May and June of 2009 members of the workgroup piloted the distribution of educational materials. Many workgroup members distributed them during routine inspections and several decided to deliver and present the materials at predetermined times when the manager could give them his or her full attention.

Based on their experience the workgroup recommends that sanitarians:

- ◆ Use the "Talking Points Guide" to keep the message consistent \*
- ◆ Take at least 5 to 10 minutes to discuss the focus of the campaign
- ◆ Discuss the importance of developing/reviewing Employee Health or Sick Leave Policies \*
- ◆ Consult with the qualified food operator or manager to decide the best place to hang the posters and hang them while in the establishment.
- ◆ Place your local health department mailing label on the back of the pamphlet

\* See attached "Talking Points Guide" enclosure



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The FPP is also in the process of developing a web page that will include the campaign information as well as links to sites where inspectors and managers can obtain additional information.

As a result of Lisa's efforts, FDA will feature the materials and goals of the educational campaign during an upcoming satellite broadcast titled "Using Employee Health and Personal Hygiene Measures" to prevent foodborne illness in the retail food environment. The broadcast will air on November 19, 2009. Information on where to view the broadcast and contact hours will be sent once the viewing sites are finalized.

At this time, an FPP intern is packaging the materials for distribution to all 80 local health departments. It is a goal of the project to get these educational materials into every class III & IV food service establishment in CT. The larger health departments will be provided with one or more carrying cases to assist inspectors in the distribution of the posters. Local health departments will receive a bulk delivery of the posters and pamphlets in the next 1-2 months; we ask that you distribute the posters to all Class III and IV establishments in person. This can be done during routine inspections, local food safety training events, at re-licensure, or at a special pre-arranged time. Please review the materials carefully and be prepared to discuss the highlights of the campaign with QFOs, managers, your staff, and the general public who may have additional questions. Lisa and the FPP staff are also available to answer your questions or provide additional resources. You may wish to develop a distribution plan. The FPP recommends that the establishments serving high-risk populations be given the materials as soon as possible followed by other food service establishments. High risk establishments include hospitals, long term care facilities, daycare facilities, schools, group homes, and elderly feeding sites. We hope that over the course of the next year all class III and IV food service establishments across the state will have been provided with the educational materials. **Please track your department's distribution of the materials, as this information will need to be provided to CDC.**

In our effort to decrease the occurrence of foodborne disease, it is necessary that food workers and managers understand their obligation to not work while ill and to report illness to management and local health officials. If you have questions concerning this project, contact Lisa Bushnell at the number listed below.

cc: Suzanne Blancaflor, M.S., Chief, Environmental Health Section, DPH  
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