

Family Living Programs

Teaching Individuals About Keeping Food Safe

Situation

Food safety is important for all Wisconsin citizens, and the University of Wisconsin-Extension strives to provide research-based food safety education to citizens of all ages. Our goal in teaching food safety is to provide individuals with knowledge about safe food handling, storage, and preparation practices so they will be better able to purchase, prepare and serve food that is safe to eat.

We utilize safe food handling messages consistent with the national Fight BAC™! campaign that provide consumers with brief, positive actions that they can take to reduce their risk of illness in five areas:

- Clean: Wash hands and surfaces often.
- Separate: Prevent cross-contamination.
- Cook: Cook or reheat foods to proper temperatures.
- Chill: Keep cold foods cold and cool leftovers promptly.
- Store: Store food properly to prevent illness.

Response

The Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP) operates in 59 counties throughout the state. Food safety education is an integral part of WNEP programming. Over 23,000 learners received food safety lessons from WNEP educators in 2004, accounting for 32,992 teaching contacts in this area. WNEP educators taught food safety to multi-session groups and one-time groups, and provided food safety training through learn-while-you-wait education.

The two primary audiences for food safety education were youth (ages 5-11), and families with children. In 2004, there were 7,240 youth learners and 7,722 learners in families with children. Older adults, teenagers and adults without children were also a focus of food safety education efforts. Food safety lessons were offered primarily in partnership with schools (K-12), senior meal sites and programs, WIC clinics, Head Start and public health clinics.

Outcomes

The effectiveness of our food safety education programs was assessed through an evaluation project with over 1,700 low-income adults. A knowledge assessment was conducted before and after a single lesson on each topic. The table below displays the results of that assessment.

The results show that before the lesson, 41 percent of participants knew the correct temperature for cooking hamburger and 88 percent of participants knew the correct temperature after the lesson. When asked about proper hand washing, 51 percent knew how long to wash hands before the lesson, and 83 percent knew after the lesson. Before the lesson, 63 percent of participants knew the proper way to handle foods to prevent cross-contamination. Ninety-three percent knew this after the lesson. Before the lesson, 33 percent knew how to chill hot leftover foods properly, while 81 percent

understood this after the lesson. Before the lesson, 47 percent knew how to evaluate stored food to be sure it was safe to eat. After the lesson, 82 percent were able to evaluate the safety of stored food.

Effectiveness of Food Safety Education Programs

Knowledge assessed	% participants correct <u>before</u> (# of participants)	% participants correct <u>after</u> (# of participants)
Proper end point temperature for cooking hamburger	41% (683)	88% (672)
Time necessary for proper hand washing	51% (442)	83% (440)
Handling foods to prevent cross-contamination	63% (243)	93% (229)
Chilling hot leftover foods properly	33% (322)	81% (304)
Evaluating stored food to ensure safety of products consumed	47% (55)	82% (49)

Participant comments were collected to inform future evaluation projects:

- “I learned that I should separate meats from produce in my shopping cart when I’m at the store.”
- “I learned the benefits of sanitizing a cutting board with bleach and so I plan to buy some bleach.”
- “I’m pregnant – I didn’t know I was more susceptible to foodborne illness.”

Food safety education through WNEP continues to be important for low-income learners attempting to provide safe, healthy food for themselves and their families.

Contact

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