

FOOD SAFETY WORKSHOPS PREVENT ILLNESS AND REDUCE HOSPITALIZATIONS AND WORK DAYS LOST

Situation

Foodborne diseases cause approximately 48 million illnesses, 128,000 hospitalizations, and 3,000 deaths each year in the U.S. The average cost per foodborne illness is an estimated \$1,850. With approximately 60 percent of foodborne illness outbreaks nationwide attributable to food service establishments, food service personnel are key to reducing the risk of foodborne illnesses and the associated costs.

The Wyoming Food Safety Coalition (WFSC), a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary partnership, is the primary source of food safety education for food service personnel. The ServSafe programs are generally taught

by a local team, most of which include a nutrition and food safety extension educator and a health inspector.

Home canning presents another potential for food spoilage and foodborne illness. An estimated one in five households in the U.S. practices home canning. This accounts for over 44,000 households across Wyoming. Unfortunately, a high percentage of home canners use unsafe practices that put households at high risk for food spoilage and foodborne illness.

UW Extension Nutrition and Food Safety Initiative Team members use research-based canning methods to teach food preservation workshops to improve food preservation practices and reduce risk for food spoilage and foodborne illness. Workshop topics include water-bath and pressure canning, as well as freezing, dehydrating, and vegetable fermentation. A total of 386 individuals have participated in the workshops across Wyoming.

Impact

Estimates based on data from an evaluation project conducted by UW Extension for WFSC show this year's



488 participants in WFSC's ServSafe programs have made the following changes:

- 97 percent made at least one change related to cleanliness; for example, washed their hands more often.
- 80 percent made at least one change related to cooling food; for example, put food into shallow containers or cut meat into smaller pieces before placing it in refrigerator.
- 78 percent made at least one change related to food preparation and prevention of cross-contamination; for example, kept raw meats, cooked foods, and fresh produce separated.
- 70 percent made at least one change related to cooking food; for example, used a stove or microwave – not a steam table – to reheat food.
- 75 percent made at least one change in other areas; for example, monitored critical control points more closely.

An evaluation of the Safe and Nutritious Home Food Preservation workshop was collected from 119 participants. A large majority of participants indicated increased knowledge of core food preservation topics. Ninety-three percent indicated increased knowledge of food safety topics. Additionally, the average increase in knowledge represented a rise from low/moderate knowledge before the workshop to high/very high knowledge after the workshop.

A high percentage of participants also indicated their intentions to adopt food safety practices after attending the workshop. These behavior changes included properly venting when pressure canning, correctly adjusting recipes for altitude, and following tested recipes.

These improved food handling behaviors increase the likelihood food is safe; therefore, illnesses avoided, fewer work days missed, health-care costs controlled, and lives saved.



**UW Extension Nutrition,
Health, and Food Safety
Programs**
www.uwyo.edu/foods



ServSafe Training
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