
DATE: April 4, 2011

REPORT TITLE: **MANDATORY FOOD HANDLER CERTIFICATION**

FROM: Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services
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RECOMMENDATION

That Peel Public Health continue to offer and promote voluntary food handler training and certification.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- As required by the Ontario Public Health Standards (Food Safety Protocol, 2008) Peel Public Health has offered a food handler training and certification program on a voluntary basis for many years.
- A systematic review of the available literature revealed insufficient research evidence to conclude that a mandatory food handler training program would improve the food safety practices of food handlers working in commercial food premises.
- There is evidence that regular inspections reduce the number of food safety infractions.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

On March 3, 2010 a report to Regional Council recommended that the Medical Officer of Health further research the implementation of a mandatory food handler training and certification program in Peel Region and report back to Regional Council.

The Ontario Public Health Standards (Food Safety Protocol) requires that boards of health ensure that a food safety education program is available to food handlers of all food premises (high, moderate and low risk). The Protocol also requires promoting that a minimum of one operator and food handler each be certified in all high and moderate risk food premises, and that at least one certified food handler be present at all times during operation.

For many years Peel Public Health has offered and promoted a voluntary food handler training and certification program. This program reaches a limited number of food handlers relative to the total number of food handlers and managers employed in the approximately 3,400 high and medium risk food premises in Peel region. The following number of food

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handlers were trained and certified in the past three years:

- 2010 - 1,493
- 2009 - 1,380
- 2008 - 1,313

2. Methods

Environmental Health Division staff conducted a systematic review of the available literature on the effectiveness of mandatory food handler training in improving the food safety practices of food handlers employed in commercial food establishments.

Different sources of published and unpublished research literature were searched. Studies or reviews were included if they had a control group, were based in commercial food premises, and had a mandatory food handler training component. Other studies were found by searching journals and references to publications in retrieved papers. Some authors were contacted and interviews were conducted with public health staff involved in developing mandatory food handler programs in Ontario. Presentations and discussion also occurred at a meeting hosted by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) in August, 2010.

3. Findings

Three single studies (Cates, 2009; Noble, 2009; Kassa 2010) and one systematic review (Mann, 2001) from 41 articles found, met the inclusion criteria and were assessed for quality. Mann (2001) and Cates (2009) were accepted as being of sufficiently strong quality to be included in this review.

The review found that various methods of delivering training (live lecture, taped instruction, or computer-based system) are equally effective at enhancing food handler knowledge. Mandatory training of food managers whose premises had been closed because of a threat to public health showed a decrease in certain types of infractions.

Based on the results of this review there is currently insufficient research evidence to conclude that mandatory food handler training improves the food safety practices of food handlers working in commercial food premises. Evidence was found that regular inspections versus complaint based inspections reduce the number of food safety infractions.

Peel Public Health staff currently conduct regular, unannounced inspections of high risk premises once per quarter, medium risk twice per year, and low risk once per year. Follow-up inspections are done if significant non-compliance with the Ontario Food Premises regulation is observed.

4. Proposed Direction

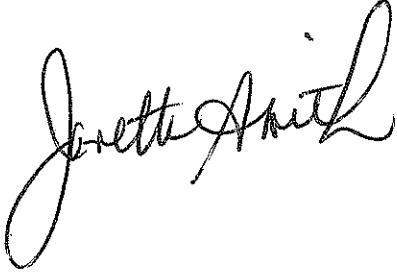
Public Health staff will monitor the food safety training programs of other Ontario health units and advocate for rigorous evaluations of training programs to add to the literature on the effectiveness of food handler training in improving food safety practices. Peel Health staff will also consider opportunities to partner with agencies such as the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion to evaluate the effectiveness of food handler training in improving food safety practices in commercial food establishments. The literature on this subject will be reviewed again at the appropriate time.

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CONCLUSION

Based on a lack of available evidence demonstrating that mandatory food handler training improves the food handling practices of commercial food handlers, it is recommended that Peel Public Health not move forward with mandatory food handler training at this time.



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c. Legislative Services