



Response & recovery after a sewage backup in foodservice

Public Health Information Brief

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Background and Summary

A foodservice facility depends upon utility services such as a properly operating sewage system. A sewage backup is the overflow of sewage from equipment or plumbing facilities within a foodservice establishment. If a foodservice operation has a sewage backup, an imminent health hazard (a significant threat or danger to health that requires immediate correction) may exist. It creates a crisis situation that requires immediate actions, and sometimes, ceasing of operations to prevent danger to health of employees and customers.

Sewage water contaminants may include not only foodborne pathogens such as *E. coli*, norovirus, hepatitis A, *Shigella*, etc. but also parasites such as *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium*, chemicals and toxins. These contaminants can get into food or onto employees and customers and cause illnesses.

Your establishment has sewage backup if there is any one or more of these conditions:

- standing water/sewage is in drains;
- restrooms have toilets that do not flush or have sewage overflowing;
- waste water from dish machine or sinks is not draining or is spilling onto floors;
- the grease trap is not functioning or
- employees are walking in sewage/overflowing water and tracking throughout the establishment.

The following guidelines are intended to assist with the development of procedures to address a sewage backup in a foodservice operation. It is important that the manager or person-in-charge ensures that if these temporary procedures are needed, they are strictly followed and all operations operate in compliance with food safety requirements.

Be prepared

- Responding quickly to a sewage backup may help minimize the issues and facilitate getting the foodservice operation back open, if closure is necessary. Here are some contacts and resources to have available:
- Contact list/phone numbers for services to call in the event of a sewage backup:
 - Plumber/drain cleaning service
 - Septic tank/grease trap pumping
 - Local health department
 - Professional cleaning/remediation service
- Floor plan with location of drains/sewer
- Procedures for clean-up and disinfecting of affected areas
- Cleanup tools and supply of chlorine bleach or a disinfectant with efficacy against norovirus
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) such as rubber gloves, masks, goggles, aprons, boots, etc.

Response to sewage back up

IF THERE IS CONTINUOUS OVERFLOW AND/OR BACKUP OF SEWAGE INTO THE FACILITY:

- **CEASE ALL OPERATIONS AND CLOSE LOCATION UNTIL SEWAGE BACKUP IS REPAIRED, FACILITY IS CLEANED AND DISINFECTED.**
- Place a “Closed” sign on the door to prevent additional customers from entering.
- Contact local health department to notify of sewage backup. Follow their direction for closure or get approval for alternate procedures IF allowed to remain open.
- Block off affected area(s) to prevent customers or employees from being exposed to sewage or tracking sewage to other areas.
- Contact plumber or pumping service to “snake” drains to remove obstruction, if appropriate.
- Stop using toilets, sinks or other equipment that might continue to add to the backup.
- If all toilets in facility do not drain and no alternative facilities are available, cease operations and close.
- Cease any food preparation if drains are not functioning.
- Cease any food preparation when plumber is working.

The following table contains action steps and alternative procedures for various foodservice operations that may be affected by a limited sewage backup. These alternative procedures may be implemented only IF they have been pre-approved by the health department. Otherwise cease operations as directed.

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Issue	Alternate Procedures
Equipment directly connected to the plumbing system not draining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove the affected equipment/fixture from service and call plumber/service company. Use other properly operating equipment. Cease operations if no other replacement equipment and close location.
Handwashing sinks do not drain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up a temporary handwashing station with hot water in insulated container with a spigot so water can flow over hands. Waste water must be collected in a container and then emptied into an operating mop sink or toilet. Soap, disposable towels, sign and waste can must also be provided. If proper alternative handwashing cannot be provided, cease all operations and close location.
Toilet facilities do not drain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toilet must be accessible to employees at all times. In a multi-facility location, e.g., mall, toilets may be available for use until repairs can be made. Cease operations if no alternate toilets are available.
Food preparation sinks do not drain (thawing food, washing fruits and vegetables)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thaw food in cooler or as part of the cooking process. Use packaged or canned fruits and vegetables so produce does not have to be washed. Use alternative sinks that operate properly. If no alternate sinks available, cease operations and close location until repairs can be made.
Warewashing sinks/equipment do not drain properly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stop using the equipment and cease warewashing. Use single-use/single-service utensils, tableware, etc. Use menu limited only to foods that have been pre-packaged, and manufactured in commercial food processing facility, bottled water, canned sodas. Cease operations if unable to continue food preparation and use of single-use/single-service utensils cannot be sustained.
Mop sink not draining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dispose of mop water into an operating toilet. Cease operations if the facility cannot be kept sanitary, as necessary.

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Recovery from sewage back up

- Follow all health department directions and requirements to reopen.
- Consider contracting with professional remediation/cleaning service with experience in cleaning up and disinfecting foodservice locations following sewage backup.
 - Verify that they use a disinfectant or decontamination process that is effective against norovirus, a potential contaminant of sewage backup.
- If foodservice employees are involved in clean-up, it is important that they are provided with personal protective equipment (eye protection, rubber boots, gloves and overalls) and wash hands and change clothing after cleanup. Exposure to chemicals used in clean up may be hazardous.
- All potentially contaminated surfaces must be cleaned, rinsed and then disinfected with a solution of 1:50 dilution chlorine bleach and water (1/3 cup unscented bleach to 1 gallon water) or an equivalent disinfectant with efficacy against norovirus. Any food contact surfaces disinfected must then be rinsed with water.
 - **Quat sanitizer is not an effective disinfectant for this clean-up. Do not allow contact of Quat sanitizer and chlorine bleach as a hazardous gas may form.**
 - Disinfect any mops or tools used in clean-up or discard.
- Discard all food items or single-use/single service items that potentially may have been contaminated with splatter or debris from sewage during efforts to clean up sewage water. **IF IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**
- If equipment or utensils are possibly contaminated, do not use. They must be washed, rinsed, disinfected, and then rinsed with water before put back into service.
- Contaminated linens must be discarded or washed in hot water with detergent and bleach and then dried in a mechanical dryer.
- Discard/replace carpets that have been contaminated. Alternatively, steam cleaning may be effective – 170°F for 5 minutes or 212°F for 1 minute.
- Document all activities performed, and have available for health department review.
- Contact health department following recovery activities to get approval for reopening.

Being prepared with procedures and knowing how to respond and recover from a sewage backup incident in your facility will be important to protect your customers and employees, as well as to ensure business continuity. Coordinating efforts with your local health department will facilitate getting the foodservice operation reopened as soon as possible.

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