



PART OF THE 2022 SERIES

# Top 10 Food Safety Challenges

## CASUAL DINING RESTAURANTS

More than ever before, consumers are choosing where to dine based on visual health and safety cues. Casual dining chains continue to face challenges of keeping up with off-premise demand and labor shortages, which may be leading to cracks in food safety that could turn customers away. See what the top issues were in more than 2,500 assessments conducted by Steritech in the first 7 months of 2022.



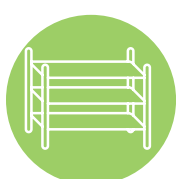
### 01 | Cleanliness of nonfood-contact surfaces

Even when surfaces in a food environment don't contact food, their cleanliness is critical. Grease, dirt, and pathogens can collect on surfaces such as shelving, cooler handles, knobs and buttons, and nonfood-contact surfaces of equipment. This poses cross-contamination risks, so be sure these items are on your daily cleaning regimen.



### 02 | Cleanliness of food-contact surfaces

Any tool or piece of equipment that touches food is a food-contact surface. In busy kitchens, these surfaces aren't being cleaned as thoroughly and as often as needed. Frequently cited items include ice machines, pans, cutting boards, and bar/soda nozzles. Assign responsibility to individuals to ensure cleaning is completed on the right schedule (and correctly).



### 03 | Condition of nonfood-contact surfaces

Like cleanliness, the condition of nonfood-contact surfaces impacts food safety. For example, cracked knife handles, damaged cooler gaskets, and rusted shelving are difficult to clean, meaning they can harbor bacteria and become cross-contamination hazards or pose physical contamination risks. Budget appropriately for replacement and repair of equipment.



### 04 | General facility cleanliness

This line item focuses on the cleanliness of floors, walls, and ceilings. For casual dining restaurants, the takeaway is to focus on cleaning "out of sight" areas both low and high. Debris, grease, and food remnants often build up under fixed or hard to move equipment. Vent hoods, walls, and other areas up high collect grease, food splatter, and dust.



### 05 | Cold holding

One of the biggest risks to food is temperature. Foods that must remain cold to prevent the rapid growth of pathogens, such as cut tomatoes and lettuce, must be held at 41°F or lower. This is often cited when products on the prep line go out of temperature in hot kitchens, so take temperatures regularly and invest in pre-chilled, insulated wells to help keep them cold.



### 06 | Condition of food-contact surfaces

Kitchen activity can take a toll on equipment: nicked slicer and knife blades, cutting board scarring, and broken fryer basket wires. This hinders cleaning and allows for pathogen harborage or creates physical contamination hazards. Utilize services to extend the life of equipment, such as cutting board resurfacing, or remove damaged items from service.



### 07 | In-use utensil storage

Scoops, tongs, and ladles are important equipment to avoid bare hand contact with food. However, if these utensils aren't stored and handled properly during their use, they can easily contaminate the food they contact. The top culprit is the ice scoop. Use a proper scoop with a handle and use a scoop holder to store it; do not leave it in the ice.



### 08 | Food protection, general

When being stored or held, foods must be properly protected to avoid contamination. In simple terms, that means keeping them covered. Steritech experts most often cite this line item when foods are left uncovered on the shelves of walk-in coolers. This leaves them vulnerable to the potential for contamination from dripping moisture.



### 09 | Personal item storage

When employees bring personal items to work – purses, backpacks, coats, gym bags – there should be a designated area for them to be kept, away from kitchens, food prep, and food storage. Personal items can be cross-contamination or physical contamination hazards and harbor pests. Pro tip: Regularly clean and inspect the designated area.



### 10 | Sanitizing (non-dish machine)

While the use of sanitizer buckets can save time, they can become a food safety issue if the sanitizer solution is not replaced regularly. It should be changed when it gets cloudy or if there is heavy debris. Be sure to stock sanitizer test strips and educate all employees on how to use them to test sanitizer solution to be sure concentrations are at the right level.

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