

Unique Meal Preparation and Service – Adult Care

A common goal of modern adult care practices is to balance risk management with improving quality of life for the residents of the adult care facility. Sometimes this involves allowing residents to participate in food preparation and food service.

You can have unique meal preparation and service in your adult care facility, so long as the facility can safely accommodate the practice and has a full kitchen. The facility's Food Handling Permit cannot have any conditions that would restrict these types of activities.

During times of outbreak or unusually high illness rates do not allow any unique meal preparation and service activities. There is a much higher risk of spreading illnesses to other residents through food when there is already an outbreak happening. Residents with symptoms of gastrointestinal illness (e.g. vomiting or diarrhea) should not participate at any time.

Your Public Health Inspector may advise you to stop unique meal preparation and service if the Inspector identifies unacceptable risks.



Resident Participation in Meal Preparation

Residents may be encouraged to participate in meal preparation for themselves, for their housing pod or the facility. However, resident participation can mean more risk of food contamination and injury. Keep the following in mind:

- Allow residents to participate in approved food preparation areas only.
- Get approval from the Public Health Inspector for the spaces where residents will participate in meal preparation. Choose an area that is appropriate for the type of food preparation taking place, and decide if part of the food preparation will be done by food services staff in another area, like the main kitchen. There needs to be proper access to hand sinks. Consider what equipment and surfaces will be required. There may be a need for food preparation sinks, proper equipment for cooking, temperature control of food, dishwashing, and cleaning, and sanitizing.

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- Qualified site staff should first decide which residents can safely prepare food for others. Consider cognitive and physical abilities of the resident. For example, if a resident has poor personal hygiene behavior, or doesn't follow proper hand washing directions, the resident should not prepare food for others.
- Arrange a caregiver or food services staff member to supervise when residents are participating in meal preparation.
- The staff members that supervise residents during meal preparation need to have some basic safe food handling training. If staff members require food safety training, there is an online AHS food safety basics course. This course is available free of charge at www.ahs.ca/eph/Page3151.aspx.
- Consider limiting resident meal preparation to lower risk foods (e.g. no handling of raw meats).
- Residents involved in meal preparation must wash their hands before any food handling takes place. Hand washing is also necessary after any activity that may contaminate their hands (e.g., after any contact with raw meat, coughing or sneezing into a hand-held tissue, etc.). Residents must wash their hands at a designated hand sink with warm water and soap. After washing, residents should dry their hands with paper towels.
- When handling food, alcohol-based hand sanitizer is never a replacement for hand washing. Gloves can also cause more contamination of food because they are often not used carefully enough, or not changed often enough.
- Use appropriate safety precautions and supervise the use of kitchen tools or utensils that can cause injury (e.g., sharp blades, hot water, and hot surfaces).
- Make sure that residents participating in meal preparation are wearing appropriate clothing to reduce the risk of injuries. Avoid loose-fitting clothing, long sleeves or pant legs. Shoes should be closed-toe, with foot support and grip.
- Consider the mobility and risk of falls for residents. You can provide food stations with seats for residents who may have limited mobility or poor balance. It also helps to keep tools and ingredients within reach of residents. Qualified site staff or your Public Health Inspector can provide more information on fall prevention strategies. Refer to [Preventing Falls - Adults & Older Adults](#) for more information.

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Family-style Meal Service

Family-style meal service is similar to buffet-style meal service. Service involves foods served in large trays, bowls or other serving dishes and residents help themselves. The resident can make their own decisions about how much food and what kind of food they wish to eat, depending on their appetite.

By making a few small changes to regular food service, food contamination is preventable in this style of service, including:

- Arrange a caregiver or food services staff member to supervise during family-style meal service.
- Have all residents wash their hands before the food service begins.
- Consider the residents' level of cognitive and physical ability when deciding what meal service to do. For example, staff could hold the serving dish and serve food to some residents while discussing portion size and food choices.
- Use utensils whenever possible. When utensils are not appropriate, arrange the food so residents will not touch multiple items. For example, place dinner rolls in spaced rows on a platter rather than piled in a bowl.
- Remove and discard any food that becomes obviously contaminated from service right away.
- Discard any leftover foods.

If you have questions about practicing unique meal preparation and service in your adult care facility, please contact your local public health inspector.

For more information, please contact your nearest Environmental Public Health office.

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