News for Educators

FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition

Food Safety | Nutrition | Cosmetics

November/December 2014

Wrapping Up Another Year

Welcome to CFSAN's News for Educators – the at-a-glance bi-monthly e-news from FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN). This edition wraps up another year of education and communications with current information on food safety when microwaving; an overview of common ingredients used in place of sugar; and an update on home tattoo inks. Don't miss the current list of upcoming meetings and events from FDA!

We encourage you to share this newsletter. Invite your colleagues to sign up for future issues!

Food Safety

Microwave Food Safety

As you likely know, *one in six Americans* suffer from some form of food poisoning (foodborne illness) each year. A common cause for food poisoning is food that has not been cooked to a safe temperature. Cooking food to recommended temperatures is important in all cases, including when dinner prep time is limited … and that's where microwave food safety comes in! Encourage consumers to decrease their odds of food poisoning in 2015 by following some simple steps when microwaving food:

- **Follow Package Directions.** Sometimes, proper cooking requires the use of a conventional oven, not a microwave. The instructions may call for cooking in a conventional oven, convection oven or toaster oven. In addition, some foods are shaped irregularly or are thicker in some areas. This can create an opportunity for cold spots or uneven cooking in a microwave oven, where harmful bacteria can survive. For this reason, it is important to use the appliance recommended on the label.
- **Don't Guess Watt[age].** If your microwave's wattage is lower than the wattage mentioned in the cooking instructions on the food package, it will take longer to cook than the instructions indicate. The higher the wattage of a microwave oven, the faster it will cook food. If you don't know the wattage of your microwave oven, look for it on the inside of the door, on the serial number plate on the back, or in the owner's manual.
- **"Stand" for Safety:** After cooking time is completed, observe the "stand time" as specified in the cooking instructions. Stand time is the time after the food is removed from the heat source, but during which the food continues to cook. Don't try to use color or texture to test doneness; rather, use a food thermometer in several places to make sure it has reached a safe internal temperature. Digital thermometers are best to use because they are accurate and respond quickly to temperature changes

Online Resource:

The **Cook It Safe** campaign offers a host of assets for educators and consumers. Check out the assets for your own educational use and encourage consumers to explore the campaign's online hub.

Upcoming Events

Consumer Food Safety Education Conference
December 4 – 5, 2014
Arlington, VA
Register here.

National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) Regional Conference
December 4 – 6, 2014
Long Beach, CA

National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) National Conference
March 12 – 15, 2015
Chicago, IL

Food Safety Challenge

FDA is asking for potential breakthrough ideas on how to find disease-causing organisms in food. Learn more.

Nutrition

Sugar (Substitutes) and Spice

For many, the approach of holiday season is heralded by an abundance of sweets and “decadent” treats. But as consumers become more aware of added sugars and their alternatives, some are choosing to use sugar substitutes (“high-intensity sweeteners”) to sweeten foods and beverages like tea or coffee, or as an ingredient in other products. Unlike sweeteners such as sugar, honey, or molasses, high-intensity sweeteners add few or no calories to the foods they flavor and generally do not raise blood sugar levels. Consumers may be interested to know about the sugar substitutes that are on the market, including some familiar and some relatively new ones:

FDA-Approved Food Additives

- **Saccharin:** Brand names include Sweet ‘N Low.
- **Aspartame:** Brand names include Equal. (Note: certain individuals should avoid or restrict the use of aspartame).
- **Acesulfame potassium (Ace-K):** Brand names include Sweet One.
- **Sucralose:** Brand name is Splenda.
- **Neotame:** Brand name is Newtame.
- **Advantame:** This newest sugar substitute does not yet have a brand name; expect to see it in foods like baked goods, non-alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, chewing gum, confections and frostings, frozen desserts, gelatins and puddings, jams and jellies, processed fruits and fruit juices, toppings, and syrups. (Note: Advantame is chemically related to aspartame).

Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) Plant/Fruit Based High-Intensity Sweeteners

- Certain high purity steviol glycosides obtained from the leaves of the **Stevia plant** (*Stevia rebaudiana Bertoni*). Brand names include Truvia.
- Extracts obtained from *Siraitia grosvenorii* **Swingle fruit**, also known as Luo Han Guo or monk fruit. Brand names include Nectresse.

Online Resource:

Invite consumers to learn more about sugar substitutes and remind them to alert their health care provider about any concerns they have about a negative reaction to one of these sweeteners. Consumers can also report any non-emergency problems or concerns via **MedWatch**, FDA’s adverse event reporting program.

Cosmetics

Talking About Home Tattoos

Are you familiar with kits that contain everything you need for "in-home" tattooing? As "body art" continues to increase in popularity, FDA reminds consumers about health risks associated with tattoo inks and kits. Adverse event reports led FDA to investigate and confirm bacterial contamination of tattoo needles and inks in some tattoo kits sold online. Because it is not possible to tell whether or not a container is contaminated from looking at a bottle of ink, even tattoo artists may be using contaminated inks. Inform consumers (including parents of youth who may be considering tattoos) about risks from contaminated inks and actions to take in case of infection.

- **Be aware of risk.** Contaminated ink could cause an infection. Serious consequences of an infection may be more likely in people with pre-existing heart or circulatory disease, diabetes or compromised immune systems.
- **Know the signs of infection.** Signs of an infection may include fever, rash, redness, swelling, weeping wounds, blemishes, or excessive pain at the site. If you experience any of these signs, **seek medical care right away**. Even after a localized infection has healed, the area may be permanently scarred.
- **Watch out for certain inks.** Whether at home or at a professional tattoo salon, avoid use of inks that have no brand name, carry a dragon logo, and/or are missing the name and place of business of the manufacturer or distributor; they may also be marked with "Lotch" [sic] and Batch numbers, and "Date produced" and "Best if used by" dates. These inks have been recalled due to risk of infection and should *not* be used.

Online Resource:

Encourage consumers to learn more about the risks associated with tattoo inks and tattoo kits and to report any infection to FDA and to the tattoo artist, who can who can remove a potentially contaminated ink from use to prevent others from become infected. Consumers can also report via mail using FDA's downloadable Form 3500.

For More Information

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- Get email alerts about recalls and other cosmetic safety news by subscribing to FDA's Cosmetics News, listed under "Get Email Updates."
- Visit the FDA Education Resource Library for downloadable topical handouts and fact sheets.
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