

Hot Dog Cart Health and Safety

As a hot dog cart operator it is essential that you maintain a proper focus on issues that pertain to health and safety. This includes the health and safety of yourself, any employees and your valued customers.

Even before your first day of operation you want to contact your local health department and be aware of all requirements as they relate to health and safety. Right now we are going to review a few general points to keep in mind in connection with hot dog cart health and safety.

Safe Food Handling

We will begin with the area of safe food handling. By neglecting proper food handling procedures you are irresponsibly endangering the health of your customer, along with affecting your bottom line. Here are a few fundamental principles in connection with safe food handling.

- **Buy cold food last and get it to your refrigerated storage area right away.**

When you select a commissary it would be good to select a location nearby where you purchase your frozen or cold food items. You should never leave food in a hot car!

- **Do not buy food in poor condition.**

All canned goods should be free of all dents, cracks or bulging lids. These can indicate a serious food poisoning threat. You should not buy any food that would not be use before the expiry date.

- **Make sure food is properly refrigerated.**

Regularly check the temperature in your refrigerator with an appliance thermometer. In order to keep bacteria from multiplying, the refrigerator should run at **4°C (40°F)**. Freezer unit should be at **-18°C (0°F)**.

- **Keep food preparation area properly clean.**

Wash your hands in warm soapy water before preparing food. Proper hand washing is the primarily way to combat the spread of germs. Wash hands for 15 seconds or more. Pay particular attention to fingertips, between fingers, backs of hands and base of the thumbs. Ensure that you properly dry your hands using a single use disposable towel.

You also need to wash hands after using toilet, coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose, handling money, or after touching garbage. After washing your hands do not touch your clothes or apron. This would defeat the purpose of washing your hands.

When handling food, proper headgear such as a hat or hairnet should be worn. This prevents hair from falling and contaminating the food.

In order to prevent cross contamination you want to keep raw meat away from other foods.

Also ensure all preparation surfaces are properly cleaned and sanitized. Some health departments require hotdog carts to have as many as 3 or 4 sinks on the cart. In certain areas they specify that hot dog carts have one sink for washing and rinsing utensils and one for sanitizing. The third sink would be solely for hand washing. These regulations are to prevent the occurrence of cross contamination. Contact your local health department concerning any local policies in connection with this.

- **Cook hot dogs thoroughly.**

Thorough cooking is essential to kill harmful bacteria. You are playing Russian roulette with your customer's health when you serve meat that is not properly cooked. Pre-cooked hotdogs must be at least 165°F (74°C) before serving. To accurately determine the temperature insert the thermometer lengthwise into the center of the hotdog.

- **Use clean dishes and utensils to serve food.**

Do not use the same utensils that you used to prepare raw food. This helps prevent cross contamination.

- **Never leave food out for more than two hours.**

Bacteria that can cause food poisoning can grow quickly at warm temperatures.

- **When in doubt, throw it out.**

Never taste food that looks or smells strange. It is too risky to take chances.

- **Do not prepare food when you are sick.**

This includes sneezing, runny nose, fever or any other symptoms of contagious illnesses. This can present a challenge if you do not have any employees, but you do not to risk the health of others.

- **Make sure you wear food service gloves over any burns, cuts and abrasions.**

Open infections can attract bugs which can be a major health risk. It is highly advisable to have a well stock first aid kit on hand.

A well stock first aid kit may include the following:

- acetaminophen and/or
- ibuprofen
- tweezers
- alcohol wipes
- antiseptic hand cleaner
- medical adhesive tape
- sterile gauze (four inch squares are best)
- elastic bandages
- several sizes of adhesive bandages

- insect bite swabs
- triple-antibiotic ointment
- hydrogen peroxide
- bandage scissors
- triangular bandages
- instant cold packs
- exam gloves
- barrier device for CPR

Even though it is not directly part of your first aid kit, it would be good to have accessible any information in connection with any medical conditions. This would include any wallet cards, medic alert bracelets, or other forms of jewellery, key chains and devices.

- **Do not handle food with your bare hands.**

Always use gloves, tongs and other utensils. As previously touched upon, you want to ensure that all utensils are properly clean and sanitized.

Along with the following fundamentals concerning safe food handling, your local health department may require that you or any employees take a food handlers safety course. Even if not legally required it would be advisable to do so. Feel free to check out our practice exam. For more information contact your local health department directly.

Other Hot Dog Cart Safety Concerns

Along with safe food handling, there are other safety concerns that you should be aware of as well. These include the following:

- **Fires**

Fires in a well-maintained hotdog cart are rare, but it can happen. Make sure that you have a fire extinguisher on hand.

A full spray bottle of clean water should be kept on hand if minor flare-ups do occur. Make sure that before you spray that you turn down the gas. When spraying with water you want to be extremely cautious of being scalded by the steam.

Propane tank leak is a potential fire hazard. This generally occurs under the BBQ where the gas supply tubes connect to the control knobs and the burners. In the event of a fire it is important that you immediately switch off the propane gas supply at the tank. This stops the supply of gas to the fire, which prevents the fire from spreading. After allowing sufficient time to cool down you can reconnect the loose gas fitting or tube and secure them so they cannot become loose again. Ensure that you check for any burn on the gas hose in order to prevent a repeat occurrence. Once these steps have been completed, it should be safe to open the gas supply valve again. Re-light the burners carefully. Now you would want to check under the BBQ for flames before resuming cooking operations.

There are other preventive measures that can be taken to prevent propane tank leaks. Part of your daily maintenance routine should include making sure the propane tank is in working order. You can check by whiffing air around them to smell if there is a leak. You can also wipe the areas with thick bubbly soap residue to see if there is any formation of bubbles.

Further preventive maintenance can include a daily inspection of the cart. When inspecting hoses, you want to replace or repair any damage immediately. You want to ensure that all gas hose connections are secure.

- **Thunder Storms and Lightning:**

Since your hot dog vendor cart is made with a large portion of steel, the danger of attracting lightning is a real one.

Most thunder storms may appear to be uneventful, but any thunderstorm can become severe. All thunderstorms, by definition, present the danger of lightning. Thunderstorm preparedness is a must. Thunderstorm preparedness refers to taking steps before, during, and after a thunderstorm to minimize injury and damage. Here are a few steps you can take:

- Monitor forecasts. Know in advance whether thunderstorms are likely in the area.
- Be alert for any natural signs of approaching storms.
- Take immediate action when you hear thunder. If you are close enough to the storm to hear thunder, you can be struck by lightning. You would want to shut down your cart, and seek appropriate shelter immediately.
- Do not resume the operating of your hot dog cart until you know for a certainty that the danger has subsided.

Sun Exposure:

Prolonged sun exposure is a very real risk for a hot dog vendor. The potential dangers of sun exposure caused by dangerous ultraviolet (UV) rays include the following:

- sunburn
- skin cancer
- eye damage
- premature skin aging

With this in mind, it would be advisable to take practical steps to guard against the long-term effects of prolonged exposure to the sun's UV rays.

The cart umbrella alone may not always be positioned to protect you from direct exposure to the sun. It would be good to also wear a hat. Wide brimmed hats provide better protection than Ball Caps.

It would be wise to wear sunglasses that provide **UVA** and **UVB** protection.

Using a high SPF sun block of 15 or more on any exposed skin also provides needed protection. You would want to cover any areas that are exposed to a lot of sun. It is good to keep in mind that the lips, ears and nose in particular are especially susceptible to burn. It would be good to use a sunscreen that says “broad-spectrum” on the label. This would screen out most of the **UVA** and **UVB** rays.

An additional danger from sun exposure is dehydration and sunstroke. It is important to drink a lot of water. One possible sign of dehydration is if your urine is dark or if you did not urinate all day. This can lead to deposit accumulation in your kidneys and can cause long term health problems.

By keeping in mind these potential health and safety concerns, you will take preventive measures. This will protect you, your employees and your valued customers. As the old adage goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.