

## **Health Director: Chipotle Seems to Have Had Problems Training Employees in Health Practices**

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Recent health problems at various Chipotle restaurants across the country and health code violations found at two of the restaurants in Darien have town Health Director David Knauf concerned about the company's training practices for food handlers.

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After problems with [outbreaks of e. coli bacteria](#) at various locations (not in Connecticut) and [norovirus](#) at a Chipotle restaurant in Boston, the company announced recently that it would [change its procedures](#) to keep and handle food safer.

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Among the changes: The company said it would put uncooked onions in boiling water briefly to kill some germs; test samples of meat before shipping it to restaurants; marinate chicken in plastic bags rather than bowls; and chop tomatoes and cilantro in centralized locations rather than at stores.

The company told ABC News last week: "With all these program components in place, we will be able to reduce the risk of contamination within our system to a level near zero."

But Knauf doesn't think that addresses a central problem: "It's not a question of the food sources — it's a question of practices within the establishment," he said.

"I'm not exactly sure what the training program is, but certain practices in the establishments we've observed would seem to indicate some deficiencies in their training," he said.

"I spoke to their corporate office in Denver about ratcheting up their training practices for food handlers." But even after speaking with a company official there, Knauf was not sure what the company's training program covers.

On its website, the company company has said [it's training employees more](#) since the outbreaks: "We have worked with IEH [IEH Laboratories and Consulting Group] to enhance our training processes at all levels, and we are developing rigorous in-restaurant protocols to ensure that our teams understand and implement our updated food safety practices."

In Darien, Chipotle employees at the restaurant on the Post Road are receiving more training, according to a recent inspection report.

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*See also:*

- [Health Director: Restaurant's 'Fair' Inspection Rating Should've Been 'Poor'](#) (Dec. 29)
- [You Can Now Read Full Health Inspection Reports on Darien Restaurants Online](#) (Dec. 8)

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In some [recent health inspections](#), Darien health inspectors found practices that could allow bacteria on raw food to be transferred to uncooked meat, which then wasn't always cooked hot enough.

As Darienite.com [recently reported](#): Hand washing and cooking meat thoroughly are two [ways to lessen the chances that diners will get e. coli](#), according to the Centers for Disease Control.

In [the most recent inspection](#) of a Chipotle restaurant in town, on Dec. 22, the one on the Post Road was given a "Fair" rating with a state health code score of 91. The report noted that employees were receiving additional training and that improvements had been made.

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Here's what the inspector reported from that inspection: "Misuse of prep sink — rinsing wiping cloth; must sanitize all items washed at three-bay [sink] — allow adequate contact time; bowl and utensils stored on back shelf unclear; replace stained, worn protein [meat] cutting boards (cutting boards shared among all proteins); clean inside storage areas around containers and around building — boxes, wood, garbage bags."

Those comments described problems that led to health code violations. The inspector added these additional comments:

"Grill employees have documented training — managers working grill, implemented a time clock for hand washing, refresher temperature training for employees, improvements made, hand washing and glove use observed. Rating NOT posted."

(You can find [the full health inspection report](#) here. You can find links to previous health inspection reports for the Post Road restaurant [here](#) and for the restaurant at the Interstate 95 Darien North rest stop [here](#).)

"I never would've thought that they would have temperature violations — cooking food hot enough, keeping it hot enough," Knauf said.

If uncooked food makes contact with cooked food for a while before either is served, the cooked food could get harmful bacteria, he said. The problem is called "cross-contamination," and it can also occur if the same utensil is used on raw food and cooked food — not just a serving spoon or fork, but even a thermometer used on both, he said.

"It just didn't seem as if the people handling the food understood the problems of cross-contamination," he said.