



LABORATORY SAMPLING

The Eau Claire City-County Health Department routinely samples at restaurants and retail food establishments. One type of sample taken is swabs of food contact surfaces. The different food contact surfaces that could be swabbed are slicers, knives, and cutting boards. The reason these types of equipment are tested is to determine if there are any high levels of bacteria present on the food contact surfaces that could be a concern for cross contamination.

High levels of bacteria could be a sign that equipment is:

1. Not cleaned properly - no sanitizer or incorrect sanitizer concentration
2. In need of replacement
3. There are other sources of contamination

The tests done will determine coliform levels and standard plate count (SPC). These are described as follows:

SPC or Standard Plate Count: this shows the level of general bacteria on the food contact surface. The bacteria may come from general sources like water, air, and food. It is a good test to show how well something is cleaned. High plate counts could mean that something is not being cleaned properly or may not have been sanitized.

Coliform: Coliform bacteria come from the intestines of animals. It is a broad range of bacteria so not all of them are of concern, but there are also bacteria types like E. coli that could be present that are. High levels of coliform will tell us that again the item was not cleaned and sanitized and is contaminated.

The acceptable levels that our lab will look for are:

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| SPC | 100 colony forming units (CFU) |
| Coliform | 10 colony forming units (CFU) |

If the results from swabbing show that you have high coliform and/or SPC then take a closer look at how these items are cleaned. Here are some items to look for:

1. Are food contact surfaces being washed-rinsed-sanitized every four hours?
2. Is the sanitizer at the right concentration?
3. Is the equipment in good shape with no major cracks and crevices?
4. Is the equipment stored in a manner or location where it is getting contaminated?
5. How are utensils or equipment being cleaned and sanitized, remember sponges are not allowed to clean food contact surfaces.

You will receive the results from swabbing in the mail or by email. High SPC and Coliform levels will result in one recheck. There is no fee for this as it is again an informational and educational service provided. If you have further questions please contact the Health Department at 715-839-4718 or contact your Health Inspector.