RiverStone Health | Public Health

Winter 2024/2025

Boiling Point!

News for Licensed Food Establishments

Contact Us

Protecting Public Health through food protection and food safety education

Hello 2025!

2025 is here, and so are a few new projects at your local health department, RiverStone Health. We look forward to sharing some of our improvements through Boiling Point throughout the year. Staff recently completed a comprehensive risk factor study, which will allow us to identify common risk factors across all establishments. This helps us develop strategies to better support you in providing healthy, safe food to your customers. We expect to have results available by our spring Boiling Point.

In the meantime, food manufacturers and establishments have been attempting to add unconventional ingredients into regular foods with increasing frequency. This trend is especially notable for types of tea and specialty beverages. Read on to learn more on what you can and can't sell as a licensed food establishment.

What Ingredients Are Allowed in Regular Foods?

Ingredients allowed in human food generally fall into one of three categories: conventional food, approved additives or generally recognized as safe (GRAS). **"Conventional food"** does not have a legal definition, but is reasonably understood by the public as things like grapes, carrots, potatoes, etc. The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) describes that a conventional food ingredient is a substance of natural biological origin widely consumed for its nutrient properties in the U.S. prior to January 1, 1958, without detrimental effects. **Approved food additives** are substances included in food that have a proven safety record. These substances include flavorings, preservatives, coatings and numerous other substances. The quantity of the substance added must not exceed what is reasonably required for its purpose.

Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) substances are listed in law, and include lists of spices, natural seasonings, oils and so forth. There is a petition process for safety review to add new substances to the lists. As with approved additives, the quantity of the substance must not exceed that necessary to accomplish the intended effect.

Licensed food establishments can use any of the above categories of ingredients in their food preparations.

To learn more about the FDA's regulation of food additives and GRAS ingredients, click this box!

What About Supplements?

By law, an establishment that manufactures and distributes a supplement is responsible for its safety and cannot make false or misleading claims about benefits. The manufacturer is responsible for ensuring that the product is not adulterated,

misbranded or otherwise in violation of federal law. Manufacturers of dietary supplements must also follow Current Good Manufacturing Practices, including labeling. Although the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) must be notified about a new supplement, supplements are not inspected during manufacturing like approved drugs are. There are no provisions in the law for FDA to approve dietary supplements for safety before they reach the consumer. Therefore, it is wise to check with your doctor before using a dietary supplement.
Licensed food establishments are not permitted to add supplements in their food preparations.

Kava

Traditionally, kava root has been used in the Pacific Islands to make recreational and ceremonial beverages. Dietary supplements that contain kavalactones, the active ingredient of kava, claim to relieve anxiety, improve insomnia and other ailments. Reports of adverse effects from chronic and/or heavy consumptions of kava-containing products have triggered wide-spread public health concerns. Reported adverse effects include liver toxicity, vision impairment, nausea, seizures and vision impairment.

The FDA has published documents alerting consumers to liver toxicity and has concluded that present data indicates that kava is not safe for human consumption and cannot be generally recognized as safe (GRAS). Therefore, under federal law, kava is not an approved food additive and its addition to conventional food is prohibited at licensed food establishments.

Commercial kava drinks are labeled as **supplements** which permits their sale to consumers. Kava bars are licensed food establishments that may sell packaged kava to consumers, who they can then add to drinks made on site. Common products include Melo and Leilo, but kava is often also sold as a powder or concentrate.
Consumers can legally purchase a kava supplement and add it to their drinks or food if they wish. Licensed food establishments are prohibited from adding supplements to any food. Conspicuous consumer warnings are required to be posted in kava bars so that consumers can make informed decisions regarding this product.

Persons under age 18, with liver problems, Parkinson's, or who are breastfeeding or

pregnant should avoid kava.

Kratom

Kratom is extracted tropical tree native to Southeast Asia. Traditionally consumed by chewing raw leaves or brewing them into tea, kratom is now sold in processed forms such as powders, capsules, and beverages, which can heighten health risks due to inconsistent concentrations and mislabeling.

Kratom users report effects similar to both opioids and stimulants. Reported adverse side effects can be minor, such as nausea or constipation, or severe, including seizures, anorexia, and liver toxicity among others. The FDA has also issued warnings regarding kratom products contaminated with the bacteria Salmonella or with unsafe levels of heavy metals. There are no FDA-approved uses of kratom.

Kratom is not lawfully marketed in the U.S. as a drug product, a dietary supplement or a food additive in conventional food. It is prohibited for any licensed food establishment to sell this product in any form or add it to food.

Note: Images are sourced from the FDA and product websites.

How'd we do?

We are constantly trying to serve you, our operators and licensed establishments, to the best of our ability. Please fill out our Environmental Health Services Customer Service Survey at the button below.

Thank you!

EHS Customer Service Survey

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RiverStone Health | Public Health

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