

Foodservice Updates

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Infection management in senior living foodservice



Infection control isn't just a clinical matter — it's a core foodservice concern in senior living and adult care facilities. Residents over 65 are significantly more vulnerable to foodborne illness due to slower digestive systems, weakened immunity, and chronic conditions that make recovery harder than in younger populations. Outbreaks in these settings can lead to severe outcomes, including hospitalizations and even death, which makes prevention critical.

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Operators that embed infection prevention into standard operating procedures not only protect residents' health — they support better satisfaction and regulatory compliance too.

infection

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Federal data show that between 1998 and 2017, long-term care facilities reported 230 foodborne illness outbreaks, resulting in 54 deaths and 532 hospitalizations tied to food handling failures. From 2024 to 2025, federal investigators linked a multistate *Listeria* outbreak to frozen nutritional shakes served in hospitals and long-term care facilities, resulting in 38 confirmed infections, 37 hospitalizations, and at least 12 deaths, with most patients being older adults or individuals receiving care in institutional settings.

At the same time, an Associated Press interview with public health officials reported that changes to CDC surveillance programs — such as reduced routine tracking of certain foodborne pathogens — may make outbreaks affecting vulnerable populations harder to detect. This can create risk for long-term care facilities, which continue to experience high rates of infectious gastroenteritis, including norovirus, every year.

These incidents underscore how lapses in sanitation, temperature control, or staff illness policies can quickly escalate in communal dining environments. Foodservice operators can protect themselves by using best practices for infection control, including staff training on hand hygiene, safe food handling, and sanitation protocols, reinforced through regular monitoring and documentation. It's important for facilities to adopt layered protections that address every step of meal preparation and service — preparation, cooking, cooling, and serving — because pathogens like norovirus and *Salmonella* can thrive when control points are missed.



When evaluating new systems and tools, look past the nice-to-have features and zero in on tools that attack food, labor and waste costs first..

Kitchen tech that delivers the best ROI

When foodservice operators evaluate kitchen technology investments, the strongest return on investment consistently comes from tools that address labor efficiency, food waste, and inventory control — areas tied directly to prime costs. According to the National Restaurant Association, 76 percent of U.S. operators say technology provides a competitive advantage, most often by improving productivity and easing labor pressure (rather than by adding novelty). Labor remains the biggest driver of tech investment: nearly half of operators expect increased use of technology and automation specifically to offset staffing shortages and rising wages, signaling where returns are most immediately felt.

Waste and inventory management are another high-ROI focus. Independent industry analysis shows that tighter inventory practices and data-driven forecasting help operators reduce overproduction and spoilage — critical in a sector where food waste costs the U.S. foodservice industry an estimated \$160 billion annually. A Restaurant Business report notes that operators see the most measurable financial gains when technology reduces manual processes and errors.

The takeaway: tech pays off fastest when it cuts labor hours, food loss, and operational friction — not when it simply adds new features.

Turning dining feedback into meaningful improvement in senior living



A recent study recommends senior living facilities ask residents standardized questions about food and service quality, food choice and availability, and resident participation and staff assistance as part of their feedback loop. This helps pinpoint the factors that most strongly influence satisfaction and dining behavior, enabling targeted improvements.

Foodservice is a key pillar of resident satisfaction in senior living. In the J.D. Power 2025 U.S. Senior Living Satisfaction Study, improvements in dining were the top driver of year-over-year gains in assisted living satisfaction scores — followed by staff and activity improvements. Foodservice satisfaction is closely linked to resident wellbeing and quality of life, with better dining experiences correlating with improved food intake.

But since every facility is different, the specific elements of foodservice satisfaction must come from residents themselves. This starts with collecting baseline data about resident preferences. From there, facilities can translate these insights into action tailored to resident preferences — and sustain their efforts through consistent feedback loops with residents and key family members. Feedback mechanisms could include concise satisfaction surveys focused on taste, choice, dietary needs and meal experience; resident dining committees that preview menus and suggest changes; and comment cards or digital touchpoints that capture preferences in real time.

Facilities that loop results back to kitchen and leadership teams — then communicate planned changes to residents in advance — can realize important benefits. They will build trust and help ensure that feedback leads to measurable improvements in menu offerings, service quality, and overall resident satisfaction.



Offering smaller, customizable items can help operators reduce plate waste, manage food cost, and accommodate labor fluctuations.

Snacks and small plates expand opportunities across foodservice

Snacks and small plates have moved from the margins of menus to the center of how Americans eat — and that shift creates opportunities in foodservice operations across retail, workplace, healthcare, education and senior living settings. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 95 percent of U.S. adults consume at least one snack per day, and most consume two or more, making snacks a meaningful source of daily calories and nutrients. This data reflects changing preferences across age groups: younger consumers favor flexible eating patterns, while older adults often prefer smaller portions spread throughout the day.

The National Restaurant Association reports that customers increasingly value menu formats that support grazing, sharing, and customization — driving demand for protein-forward bites, better-for-you snacks, and globally inspired small plates. In senior living and healthcare, snacks can help address reduced appetite and nutrition needs. In workplace dining, colleges, and retail foodservice, they can boost traffic and engagement outside traditional meal periods.

In your operation, is there room to invest in thoughtful snack and small-plate programs? Consider nutrient-dense, easy-to-ingest options like cottage cheese bowls with fruit, fortified smoothies, Greek yogurt parfaits, overnight oats, chia pudding, hummus and pita bread or vegetables, soft meatballs, or mashed sweet potato with sweet or savory toppings. Offering some lighter bites can help you improve satisfaction across demographics and generate incremental revenue — often with lower labor and food costs than full meals would require.