February 19, 2018

Q: I have a question for you on food handling and activity staff. In the majority of homes that I go to, activity staff handle food as part of the activity—whether it is handing out a snack or serving hot chocolate or coffee. Typically they do not go through the 2-hour food handling class, and I understood previously that they did not need to. I am just checking with on you on this information to make sure this remains correct.

A: The Illinois Department of Public Health defines “food handlers” as an individual working with unpackaged food, food equipment or utensils or food-contact surfaces. "Food employee" or "food handler" does not include unpaid volunteers in a food establishment, whether permanent or temporary. If the activity staff are passing out snacks or serving coffee or other drinks, they would not be required to take the food handler training. However, if the activity staff are working in the kitchen or working with residents in handling and preparing food as an activity, they would need to have the food handler training. Also, feeders and persons who deliver trays to residents are not considered “food handlers.”