HAWAI'I DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH CONDUCTS FIRST VIRTUAL PRE-OPENING INSPECTION OF NEW FOOD ESTABLISHMENT

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Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers drive-through in Hawai'i Kai receives approval to open

HONOLULU – This morning, the Hawai'i Department of Health Food Safety Branch conducted its first virtual restaurant inspection of a food establishment, an innovative interim emergency procedure to support new businesses and create jobs in a challenging economic environment.

Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers in Hawai'i Kai passed the 40-minute virtual inspection conducted from the DOH's Halawa facility and received the green light to operate its drive-through business. This is the chain's second location in Hawai'i.

Virtual inspections are only for pre-openings of new restaurants during the current emergency order. An in-person, follow-up inspection will be conducted within 30 days after the governor lifts the emergency proclamation to ensure food establishments are adhering to safe food handling practices.

"During this time, we're staying in touch with local restaurants and businesses by utilizing technology through email and phone to protect our community's health and safety," said Food Safety Branch Chief Peter Oshiro. "This interim virtual inspection process with Raising Cane's is one innovation to help Hawai'i restaurants open doors, create jobs to stimulate the economy and keep moving forward."

During the virtual pre-operations inspection process, the restaurant managers used a video call to walk inspectors remotely through their facility to view the layout and to ensure equipment was working properly. This includes checking probe-type thermometers, refrigerator temperature checks, and sanitizing test kits. Normal food safety inspections are focused on identifying critical risk factors that could contribute to food-borne illnesses.

"We appreciate the Department's innovative and timely use of technology to complete the

process to safely open our Hawai‘i Kai drive-thru, allowing Raising Cane’s to bring new jobs to the area and safely serve customers hot fresh chicken finger meals,” said Raising Cane’s Area Operations Manager, Ray Yeung. “The Food Safety Branch provided a clear and thorough procedure which we were able to comply completely with and we look forward to working with them in-person when the state fully reopens businesses.”

Restaurants are now limited to takeout and drive-through service due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the inspection process was temporarily halted for new food establishments. As the COVID-19 environment evolves, the process will change as well. Routine, unannounced inspections during normal daily operations have been temporarily suspended.

About the Department of Health Food Safety Branch

Under the state’s restaurant placarding program, DOH’s Food Safety Program has conducted more than 60,000 inspections. Hawai‘i’s restaurants, hotels, retail and food manufacturing industry have embraced the state’s food safety regulations and earned an impressive 99.8 percent compliance rate since the program’s inception in 2014.

The DOH Food Safety Branch protects and promotes the health of Hawai‘i residents and visitors through education of food industry workers and regulation of food establishments statewide. The branch conducts routine health inspections of food establishments where food products are prepared, manufactured, distributed, or sold. The branch also investigates the sources of food borne illnesses and potential adulteration; and is charged with mitigating foodborne outbreaks and/or the prevention of future occurrences. Health inspectors work with business owners, food service workers, and the food industry to ensure safe food preparation practices and sanitary conditions. For more information on the department’s restaurant placarding program, visit http://health.hawaii.gov/san/.

DOH’s commitment to protecting the public’s health and serving the people of Hawai‘i has extended beyond circumstances related to COVID-19. While DOH has been focused on mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in its communities, the Food Safety Branch has been providing the following essential services:

- DOH’s Food Safety Branch has continued its normal business hours, weekdays from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Its staff are working remotely, fielding calls and supporting food-illness investigations and other health hazards unrelated to COVID-19.
- The walk-in counter remains open for food establishment permitting inquiries, with proper physical distancing measures in place to help keep its frontline workers and the public safe.
- Staff continues to review and approve building plans for new construction and renovation permits pertaining to several industries, including restaurants, markets, swimming pools and more.

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PDF: Hawai’i Department of Health conducts first virtual pre-opening inspection of new food establishment