

# Guide to food hygiene



FOOD  
STANDARDS  
AGENCY





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# Introduction

This booklet gives general hygiene advice for people working in food businesses. It describes some practical measures you can take to ensure good hygiene in your business and prevent food poisoning.



## Why food hygiene is important

Good food hygiene is essential to ensure that the food you sell is safe. It will help you protect your customers and the reputation of your business, and of course you need to observe good hygiene to obey the law.

Poor hygiene procedures in your food business can put your customers at risk. Harmful bacteria that cause food poisoning can spread very easily, so it is your responsibility to make sure that you do everything you can to prevent this. Food poisoning can lead to serious illness, or even death, especially among the very young, the very old and ill people, who are particularly at risk from food poisoning.

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# Keeping food safe

There are four main defences against the growth and spread of bacteria:

- ensuring food areas are clean and good standards of personal hygiene are maintained
- cooking foods thoroughly
- keeping foods at the right temperature
- preventing cross-contamination

To achieve good food hygiene you need to consider these actions during your whole business process, from the moment you receive a delivery of food to when a customer buys the final product. If hygiene standards fail at any stage, this could cause food poisoning. You can help prevent this by following the practical advice in this booklet.



## Cross-contamination

Cross-contamination is the transfer of bacteria from foods (usually raw) to other foods. The bacteria can be transferred directly when one food touches (or drips onto) another, or indirectly, for example from hands, equipment, work surfaces, cloths or knives and other utensils. Cross-contamination is one of the major causes of food poisoning.

It is very easy for cross-contamination to happen. These are some of the most common causes:

- storing raw and ready-to-eat food together
- not washing hands after touching raw food
- using the same chopping board or knife for raw and ready-to-eat food

## Temperature control

Good temperature control is essential to keep certain foods safe. Products such as prepared ready-to-eat foods, cooked foods, smoked meat or fish, and certain dairy products must, by law, be kept hot or chilled until they are served to the customer. If they

Chilled food must be kept at or below 8°C (46°F)

Hot food must be kept above 63°C (145°F)

It is an offence to allow food to be kept at temperatures that would cause a risk to health.

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are not, harmful bacteria could grow or toxins (poisons) could form in the food and make your customers ill.

Foods that need to be chilled should be kept at 8°C (46°F) or below. Foods that are being kept hot before serving should remain above 63°C (145°F). The temperature requirements in Scotland are slightly different to the rest of the UK. See the section on the Food Safety (Temperature Control) Regulations on page 24 for details.

There are certain occasions when foods can be kept outside these temperatures for a limited period, for example to be served or displayed, when food needs to be handled during or after processing, and when equipment is being defrosted or temporarily breaks down.

Check fridges and refrigerated display units regularly to ensure they are working correctly and keeping food at the correct temperature. Ensure that staff report any faults as soon as possible and take prompt action to correct the problem.

For more information about temperature control, consult an environmental health officer.



# Staff

## Personal hygiene

Food can be contaminated very easily when it is handled. Therefore it is essential that you and your staff maintain good standards of personal hygiene at all times to ensure that food does not get contaminated with harmful germs, dirt or 'foreign bodies'.

You and your staff should wash and dry your hands regularly when handling food, in particular:

- before starting work
- before handling ready-to-eat food
- after touching raw food, especially raw meat or poultry
- after going to the toilet
- after a break

## Washing hands effectively

To wash hands thoroughly, use warm water and a liquid soap. Work up a good lather and make sure you wash your wrists, hands, fingers, thumbs, fingernails, and in between the fingers. Rinse the soap off your hands and dry them thoroughly using disposable towels or a hot-air dryer (not on your apron).

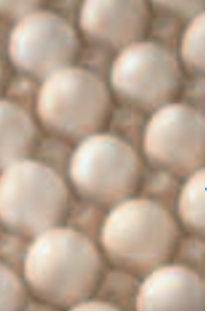
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Staff working in food areas should:

- wear clean clothes and an apron or protective garment
- not touch their face or hair
- cover cuts or sores with clean waterproof dressings
- wash hands after blowing their nose
- not cough or sneeze over food
- not smoke
- not wear jewellery or false nails, which might fall into food

## **Training and supervision**

By law, food handlers must receive adequate supervision, instruction and/or training in food hygiene for the work they do. The owner of the food business is responsible for ensuring that this happens. You can seek advice about training from your local environmental health officer.



## Staff illness

Staff with symptoms of food poisoning, such as diarrhoea, vomiting or stomach pains, must not handle food, because they could easily contaminate it and make others ill. An employee showing signs of this kind of illness must leave food preparation areas straight away.

Staff should also report any other type of illness or skin condition to a manager. If you are not sure whether you or someone else should be working with food, seek advice from an environmental health officer or doctor urgently.

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# Safe food handling

To make sure that food is safe you must follow good hygiene at every stage of food handling, from receiving deliveries of ingredients to serving the customer. It is especially important to prevent cross-contamination and keep foods at the right temperature.

## Ingredients

Choose reputable food suppliers, so you know that you are buying products that have been stored, processed or treated safely. When food is delivered, check that:

- it is what you ordered
- chilled and frozen food is at the correct temperature
- the packaging is undamaged and intact

If you have any concerns about the safety of the delivery do not accept it.

### Practical tip

Observe food deliveries closely. Consider, for example, is the inside of the delivery van clean and well ordered? Are raw and cooked foods kept apart? Are foods kept at the right temperature? If you have any concerns, tell your supplier and contact your local environmental health department.



## Storing food

You must store food correctly to keep it safe. In particular, make sure you:

- observe temperature control (see page 6)
- keep raw food, especially meat, away from ready-to-eat food, ideally in separate fridges
- store raw meat in sealable containers at the bottom of the fridge, so it can't touch or drip onto ready-to-eat food
- don't overload fridges because this will hinder the circulation of cool air and might mean the food is not kept cold enough
- store dried foods (such as grains, pulses and vegetables) off the floor, ideally in sealable containers, to protect them from pests

Foods that you store should be labelled with a 'Use by' or 'Best before' date, and details of how they need to be stored (for example if they need chilling). Stock rotation, which makes sure that older food is used first, will help you to prevent food going off and avoid wastage.

### Practical tip

Remember the rule **first in, first out** when storing foods. Move foods with a closer 'Use by' or 'Best before' date to the front of the shelf, so they are used sooner.

- Never use food after the ‘Use by’ date, since it might not be safe to eat.
- Check food in your fridge every day to make sure it is still within the ‘Use by’ date.
- Follow any storage instructions on the product label or packaging.

## Food preparation

Food can become contaminated very easily during preparation. Food handlers should:

- observe good personal hygiene (see page 8)
- use different chopping boards/work surfaces for raw food and ready-to-eat food
- use different equipment and utensils for raw and ready-to-eat food, wherever possible
- clean equipment and surfaces thoroughly before and after use
- avoid unnecessary handling of food – use clean tongs, plates or trays instead
- keep chilled food out of the fridge for the shortest time possible during preparation
- use drinking water to wash and prepare food, or make ice

### Practical tip

Use a colour coding system for utensils and chopping boards to distinguish those used for raw food from those used for ready-to-eat food.



Remember, it is very important to wash fresh fruit, vegetables and salad vegetables, such as lettuce, if they are being served raw.

## Cooking

Proper cooking kills food poisoning bacteria such as salmonella, campylobacter, *E.coli* O157 and listeria. It is important to cook food thoroughly, especially meat. When you cook poultry, minced/chopped meat (for example burgers and sausages) and rolled joints, you should make sure that the centre of the meat reaches a temperature of at least 70°C for two minutes, or an equivalent time/temperature combination (see box).

### Minimum cooking times for meat

The centre of the meat should reach one of the following temperatures for at least the time given.

60°C – 45 mins

75°C – 30 secs

65°C – 10 mins

80°C – 6 secs

70°C – 2 mins

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You do not need to follow the minimum cooking times when you are cooking **whole cuts or joints** of meat traditionally served pink or rare at the customer's request, such as beef or lamb. This also applies to whole cuts or joints of pork. If the meat is pierced (for example with skewers) or on the bone, you should follow the minimum cooking times.

When reheating food, especially meat, make sure it is piping hot all the way through and do not reheat it more than once.

If you use a probe thermometer to check the temperature of food, be careful that it does not cause contamination. Probes should be kept clean and disinfected. Ideally, use different probes for checking the temperature of ready-to-eat foods and foods being cooked from raw and clean and disinfect probes between uses. Ensure that probes are set (calibrated) and working correctly, and that staff know how to use them properly.

Food should be cooled as quickly as possible after cooking (unless it is being kept hot until serving). You can speed up the cooling process by dividing food into smaller amounts and placing it in shallow dishes. Do not put foods in the fridge when they are still hot, because this could warm up other foods.



## Service and display

The main risks during service or display of food are:

- inadequate temperature control
- cross-contamination

When you are serving or displaying foods, you can keep them out of temperature control for a limited period on one occasion only.

- Hot foods can be kept below 63°C (145°F) for a **maximum of two hours**.
- Chilled foods can be kept above 8°C (46°F) for a **maximum of four hours**.

You must not exceed these times. After food has been out of temperature control for one period it must be either thrown away or cooled as quickly as possible and then chilled until final use. It is advisable to keep foods such as cooked meats and dairy products in refrigerated display units at all times.

The temperature requirements in Scotland are slightly different to the rest of the UK. See the section on the Food Safety (Temperature Control) Regulations on page 24 for details.

You can minimise the risk of cross-contamination by:

- separating raw and ready-to-eat foods on display
- providing separate utensils for raw and ready-to-eat foods

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## Transporting food

When you are transporting food, you must prevent it from becoming contaminated. It is especially important to make sure that:

- food is transported in packaging or containers that protect it from contamination
- chilled foods are kept at the right temperature
- raw foods and ready-to-eat foods are kept apart

Vehicles used to transport food must be kept clean and in good repair. Where necessary they should be designed to allow effective disinfection.

When a container or vehicle is used to transport different foods, or both food and non-food products at the same time, the products should be separated to protect against contamination.

When different products are transported, in different loads, in the same container or vehicle, the container should be cleaned effectively between loads to avoid contamination.



## Where you work

However big or small your business is, the place where you work must be kept clean and be well maintained to help ensure good hygiene.

Premises should be designed in a way that allows you to keep the place clean and work hygienically. It is also important to keep out pests, such as flies and rats, so make sure that doors and external windows do this, for example by fitting screens.

### Practical tip

Before selecting equipment or premises consult your local environmental health officer, who can offer helpful advice.

### Cleaning up

You must make sure that your premises and all equipment and surfaces that come into contact with food are kept clean and, where necessary, disinfected. Using a cleaning schedule is a good way to ensure appropriate cleaning.

While you are working, it is a good idea to **clean as you go**, mopping up any spills as they happen and cleaning work surfaces, equipment and floors frequently so that waste and dirt do not build up.

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Remember to keep cleaning equipment, such as mops and cloths, clean.

Careful storage of waste is important to avoid attracting pests, such as flies and rats. You should:

- not allow food or other waste to build up in food areas
- keep the storage area clean
- arrange for rubbish to be removed frequently

### Practical tip

**Do not assume staff will know how to clean premises and equipment correctly. You should provide appropriate instruction.**

## Staff facilities

It is especially important to make sure that suitable facilities are provided for staff to wash their hands.

- There should be a basin for washing hands in food areas. You will also need a sink to use for cleaning premises, equipment, utensils, etc. If unwrapped food is handled as part of your business, you must have a separate sink just for washing food.
- Washbasins must have hot and cold running water, and you should provide soap and suitable equipment for drying hands, such as disposable towels or hot-air dryers.



- When staff have used the toilet, they should not wash their hands in the same basin that is used for washing hands during food preparation, or in the sinks used for washing food or for cleaning. Otherwise, they could bring germs into the food area.

### **Mobile/temporary premises**

People running mobile or temporary premises, such as stalls or burger vans, need to be aware of the same hygiene issues as other food businesses. Because space is limited, the requirements are slightly different. Consult your local environmental health officer for information.

You must make sure that:

- there are adequate facilities to prepare and serve food safely
- you can keep food at safe temperatures and protect it from contamination
- there is access to adequate washing facilities

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# Legal requirements

Owners and managers of food businesses are responsible for ensuring that the food they provide is safe to eat and that their businesses comply with food law. In Great Britain the four key laws that apply to food businesses are:

- Food Safety Act 1990
- Food Premises Registration Regulations 1991
- Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995
- Food Safety (Temperature Control) Regulations 1995

Similar rules apply in Northern Ireland.

From 1 January 2006, the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995, the Food Safety (Temperature Control) Regulations 1995 and the Food Premises Registration Regulations 1991 will be replaced in England by EU Regulation 853/2004 and the Food Hygiene (England) Regulations 2005. Similar legislation will apply in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Most of the actual legal requirements will not change.

The main new requirement for catering businesses will be that you must be able to show what you do to make food that is safe to eat and have this written down.

The Food Safety Act 1990 will not change at all.



## Food Safety Act

Under the Food Safety Act 1990, you:

- must not sell (or keep for sale) food that is 'unfit' for people to eat
- must not cause food to be dangerous to health
- must not sell food that is not what the customer is entitled to expect, in terms of content or quality
- must not describe or present food in a way that is false or misleading

### Definition

The word **unfit** describes food that is not of a high enough standard for people to eat. For example, it might be putrid (rotten) or toxic (poisonous). Food – especially meat – will sometimes be marked as unfit for human consumption and it is an offence to sell this food to consumers. Food might become unfit if, for example, you keep it past its 'Use by' date or do not prepare it correctly.

It is important to be able to demonstrate the positive steps taken by your business to ensure good food hygiene. If you were prosecuted under the Food Safety Act, you would need to convince the court that you had taken all reasonable steps to avoid the offence you had been accused of (this is called a 'due diligence defence').

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## **Food Premises (Registration) Regulations**

If you are planning to start a new food business, you need to register with your local environmental health department 28 days before opening. If you change the activity at your food premises, you must tell your local environmental health department within 28 days of the change.

## **Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations**

These Regulations set out the basic hygiene requirements that food businesses must follow in relation to staff, premises and food handling.

Under the Regulations, you must have effective food safety management measures (or 'controls') in place, to ensure that food is produced safely and that the health of your customers is not put at risk.



## Food Safety (Temperature Control) Regulations

These Regulations cover the following issues:

- the stages of the food chain that are subject to temperature control
- the temperatures at which certain foods must be kept
- which foods are exempt from specific temperature controls
- when the temperature controls allow flexibility

Good temperature control is fundamental to food safety in many food businesses.

In Scotland the Regulations apply slightly differently. A maximum temperature for chilling foods is not specified, but businesses are still required to chill foods if they need to be chilled to keep them safe. Maximum times for keeping foods out of temperature control for service or display are not specified. And when reheated, foods must reach a minimum temperature of 82°C (180°F).

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## Enforcement

Environmental health officers will inspect your premises to make sure you are following food hygiene rules. They will offer help and advice on food safety, and can take action if they find that your standards of food hygiene are not satisfactory. In serious cases, action might include closing the premises and/or prosecution.

The Food Standards Agency booklet, **Food law inspections and your business**, explains the inspection process and your rights of appeal if you are unhappy with the way the inspection is carried out.



## Sources of information

### Industry Guides

Industry Guides give advice to food businesses on how to comply with food safety regulations. They are officially recognised by Government. The range includes the following titles:

The Catering Guide

The Retail Guide

The Market and Fairs Guide

The Wholesale Guide

The Baking Guide

The Fresh Produce Guide

The Butchers' Guide

The Vending Guide

The Flour Milling Guide

The guides are published by the Chadwick House Group Ltd. You can order them online at [www.shop.cieh.net](http://www.shop.cieh.net) or by calling 020 7827 5830 or 020 7827 9928.

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## **Environmental health officers**

You can get contact details for your local environmental health department by contacting your local authority (or district council in Northern Ireland). The Food Standards Agency website contains a database of environmental health departments in England, Wales and Scotland.

## **Food Standards Agency publications**

**Food law inspections and your business**

**Eggs – what caterers need to know**

**Starting up – Your first steps to running a catering business**

Ordering information is on the back cover of this booklet.

## **Food Standards Agency website**

Visit the Agency's site [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk) for lots of useful information about food.

The information in this booklet is intended as guidance and is not a complete statement of the law. Individual food businesses are responsible for checking how the legislation mentioned in the booklet applies to them in practice.



The **Food Standards Agency** is a UK-wide, independent Government agency, providing advice and information to the public and Government on food safety, nutrition and diet.

The Agency was created to protect the interests of consumers and its guiding principles are to:

- put the consumer first
- be open and accessible
- be an independent voice

The Agency's advice is based on the best scientific evidence available from independent expert advisory committees, and all its advice is made public.

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