

Personal Hygiene Requirements for People Preparing or Serving Food

It is essential that all employees and visitors to food premises maintain a high standard of personal hygiene to minimise any risk to food. Visibly poor hygiene practices will undermine customer confidence. Many food complaints are a direct result of poor personal hygiene.

People are a major source of food poisoning bacteria and food may become contaminated easily during preparation, handling and service. Anyone who works preparing or serving food must practice good personal hygiene. They must have clean hands, not smoke or spit in the food handling area, ensure that hair does not pose a risk of contamination, cover cuts and wounds and not wear jewellery or beauty products (e.g. false nails, nail varnish or eye lashes).

Hand hygiene

Hand washing is one of the most important personal hygiene controls when dealing with food. A supply of liquid soap, hot and cold (or mixed) running water and paper towels must be available for hand washing. Hands must not be washed in a sink used for washing food or cleaning. Hands must not be dried on tea towels or on clothing.

Handwashing is required:

- Before handling ready-to-eat food
- After handling raw foods
- After going to the toilet
- After blowing your nose or touching face, eyes, nose, mouth, hair, ears etc.
- After handling rubbish / emptying bins
- After using cleaning chemicals
- After eating, drinking or smoking

Where possible food handlers should focus on the task. However, if you stop preparing food to do something else, such as answering the telephone or taking money from a customer, hands must be washed thoroughly before starting to handle food again.

Gloves

Gloves are not a substitute for effective hand washing. Gloves can become contaminated with bacteria in much the same way as hands can, even when they are new. They should be kept clean and sanitised in a similar way to bare hands. If gloves are used, they should be changed as per the above hand-washing list for when hand

washing is required and if they become damaged or torn. It is also important to wash your hands before putting gloves on and after taking them off. If using disposable gloves ensure they are brightly coloured, food grade and non-latex.

Hand sanitising gels

Anti-bacterial gels (often referred to as hand sanitizers) are often used in addition to hand washing, but they only work on clean hands. This is because they can kill bacteria, but don't work properly on dirty or greasy hands. They also don't kill norovirus. They should NEVER be used as a replacement for hand washing.

Illness and exclusion

Individuals suffering from the symptoms of food poisoning (e.g. diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach upsets) must not prepare, handle or serve food, as they could contaminate the food and spread the infection to other staff and customers.

It is possible that people can still spread bacteria or viruses even if they feel better, therefore, they must not return to work until they have had no symptoms for 48 hours. There are certain food borne illnesses that require a food handler to cease food handling for longer periods of time and negative faecal samples are required before returning to work.

Anyone who has a family member who is suffering from diarrhoea and/or vomiting for more than 24 hours should not be allowed to prepare food.

Staff working in catering establishments have a legal responsibility to notify their manager/supervisor if they are suffering from infected wounds, a skin infection, diarrhoea, stomach upsets and / or vomiting.

If in doubt, you should contact the Head of University Catering or the Food Safety Compliance Manager.

Protective clothing

Food handlers should not travel to their place of work in their protective clothing. They should remove protective clothing, including gloves, aprons, tea-towels, if they leave the kitchen for other reasons.

Visitors to the kitchen (including maintenance personnel) should be made aware of their hygiene responsibilities and wear protective clothing if they present a risk of contamination.

Light coloured protective clothing is preferable as it shows dirt. Good protective clothing has no external pockets.

If it is deemed necessary, a head covering e.g. hairnet or hat that covers the hair should be worn.

Food Safety Information. Number 8

Food handlers must:

Have a good understanding of the principal issues of food safety and how poor personal hygiene can cause food borne illness.

Have good personal hygiene and cleanliness.

Not wear any jewellery, watches or beauty products e.g. gel or acrylic nails, nail varnish or false eye lashes. Plain band wedding rings, simple earrings & studs may be permitted in some cases.

Not behave in a way that may spread bacteria, e.g., by biting nails, licking fingers, spitting, chewing gum, playing with hair, blowing into bags or coughing and sneezing over open food.

Wear a disposable red apron when handling raw meat and poultry which must be discarded before moving on to ready-to-eat food preparation.

Cover cuts, wounds, healing skin or other skin conditions likely to cause contamination of foods (on hands or other exposed parts of the body) with waterproof dressings that are preferably bright / blue coloured for identification purposes.

Not handle food if there are scaly or infected lesions on the skin which cannot be totally covered during food handling.

Be in good health.

Report any illness to management, including illness to people living with them.

Not work if suffering from diarrhoea, vomiting and/or a stomach upset.

Keep nails short to make hand washing easier.

Dry their hands thoroughly, as bacteria can spread more easily if hands are wet or damp.

Avoid wearing strong perfumes/aftershaves as open food can absorb smells.

Follow any rules regarding allergen controls when preparing foods for a special diet.

Further Information

On the Food Standards Agency website www.food.gov.uk

In other leaflets in the food safety information series

From Nick White, Head of University Catering or Jenny Clare, Food Safety Compliance Manager