

Food Safety Standards - Health and hygiene: Responsibilities of food handlers

Chapter 3 (Australia only) Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code

NOTE: The Food Safety Standards do not apply in New Zealand. The provisions of the food standards treaty between Australia and New Zealand do not include food hygiene standards.

Under Food Safety Standard 3.2.2 Food Safety Practices and General Requirements, food handlers have an overall responsibility for doing whatever is reasonable to make sure that they do not make food unsafe or unsuitable for people to eat. Food handlers also have specific responsibilities related to their health and hygiene.

Are you a food handler?

A food handler is anyone who works in a food business and who either handles food or surfaces that are likely to be in contact with food such as cutlery, plates and bowls. A food handler may do many different things for a food business. Examples include making, cooking, preparing, serving, packing, displaying and storing food. Food handlers can also be involved in manufacturing, producing, collecting, extracting, processing, transporting, delivering, thawing or preserving food.

What must a food handler do if she or he is sick?

If a food handler has a food-borne illness

Food handlers must tell their work supervisor if they have any of the following symptoms while they are at work - vomiting, diarrhoea, a fever or a sore throat with a fever. The only exception to this is if the food handler knows that he/she has these symptoms for a different reason. For example, a food handler may be vomiting at work because of pregnancy.

Food handlers must also tell their supervisor if they have been diagnosed as having or carrying a food-borne illness.

As well as reporting the food-borne illness, the food handler must not handle any food where there is a chance they might make the food unsafe or unsuitable because of their illness. Also, if a food handler stays on at work to do other work, he or she must do everything reasonable to make sure that they do not contaminate any food.

Note: Illnesses that can be passed on through food include Hepatitis A and those caused by giardia, salmonella and campylobacter.

If a food handler has skin injuries or sores or is otherwise unwell

Food handlers must tell their supervisor about any infections or conditions like a cold or other problem that may result in discharges from their ears or nose or eyes if there is any chance that they might make food unsafe or unsuitable for people to eat as a result of their condition.

Also, if they continue to handle food with such a condition, food handlers must do whatever is reasonable to make sure that they don't contaminate any food. For example, an infected sore could be completely covered by a bandage and clothing or by a waterproof covering if on an area of bare skin, and medication can be used to dry up discharges.

If a food handler knows or suspects he or she might have contaminated some food

Food handlers must tell their supervisor if they know or think they may have made any food unsafe or unsuitable to eat. For example, jewellery worn by a food handler may have fallen into food.

What about personal hygiene?

Food handlers' personal hygiene practices and cleanliness must minimise the risk of food contamination.

The most important things they need to know are that they must:

- do whatever is reasonable to prevent their body, anything from their body or anything they are wearing, coming into contact with food or food contact surfaces;
- do whatever is reasonable to stop unnecessary contact with ready-to-eat food;
- wear clean outer clothing, depending on the type of work they do;
- make sure bandages or dressings on any exposed parts of the body are covered with a waterproof covering;
- not eat over unprotected food or surfaces likely to come in contact with food;
- not sneeze, blow or cough over unprotected food or surfaces likely to come into contact with food;
- not spit, smoke or use tobacco or similar preparations where food is handled; and
- not urinate or defecate except in a toilet.

Some special hand washing rules for food handlers

Food handlers are expected to wash their hands whenever their hands are likely to contaminate food.

This includes washing their hands:

- immediately before working with ready-to-eat food after handling raw food;
- immediately after using the toilet;
- before they start handling food or go back to handling food after other work;
- immediately after smoking, coughing, sneezing, using a handkerchief or disposable tissue, eating, drinking or using tobacco or similar substances; and
- after touching their hair, scalp or a body opening.

How should food handlers wash their hands?

- Use the hand washing facilities provided by the business.
- Clean their hands thoroughly using soap or other effective means.
- Use warm running water.
- Dry their hands thoroughly on a single use towel or in another way that is not likely to transfer disease-causing organisms onto the hands.

Need more information?

Copies of the standards, the guides to these and other fact sheets and supporting material can be found on the FSANZ website (<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/>). Food businesses may also seek advice directly from the Environmental Health Officers at their local council, or from their State or Territory health or health services department and Public Health Units. Information can also be accessed through the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing <http://www.health.gov.au/> .

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