



# Food safety

A practical guide for managers

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FOOD  
STANDARDS  
AGENCY



## Everyone who runs a food business needs to manage food safety properly, to make sure that the food they serve or sell is safe to eat.

Managing food safety is about managing everything that happens in your business. You need to have confidence in how you and your staff handle food, both when you're there and when you're not.

By managing food safety you will:

- reduce the risk of food poisoning
- obey the law
- protect your customers and your reputation

You probably have quite a few food safety procedures in your business already. This booklet aims to help you think about how you manage food safety and how you can check that what you do is working.



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## What causes food safety problems?

Food safety problems are often caused by food poisoning bacteria. These bacteria can:

- spread from hands, equipment or surfaces that haven't been thoroughly cleaned
- survive in food that isn't properly cooked
- grow and multiply in food that is left out at room temperature or isn't properly chilled
- spread from raw food to ready-to-eat food if these aren't kept separate

## How can I avoid food safety problems?

Look at every stage of your business, from when the food is delivered to when you serve or sell it to your customer. Think about what food safety problems there could be at each stage. Are the problems the same for each dish you prepare?

When you know what food safety problems there could be, you can decide how to control them.

The most common food safety problems can be controlled by good food hygiene. The main things to remember for good food hygiene are the '4 Cs':

**Cleaning • Cooking • Chilling • Cross-contamination**

The following pages describe how you can use the 4 Cs to manage food safety.



## Cleaning

Effective cleaning gets rid of bacteria on hands, equipment and surfaces. So it helps to stop bacteria from spreading onto food.

### → What you need to do

- Make sure that everyone who handles food washes their hands before starting work, after a break, after going to the toilet, after emptying a bin and before starting a new task.
- Clean food areas and equipment between different tasks, especially after handling raw food.
- Clean as you go, mopping up spills as they happen.
- Use appropriate cleaning products and follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Don't let food waste build up.

### ✓ How to check

- Supervise cleaning.
- Use a cleaning schedule and check regularly that it's being followed.
- Make sure your staff know how to use cleaning products properly and are cleaning correctly.



## Cooking

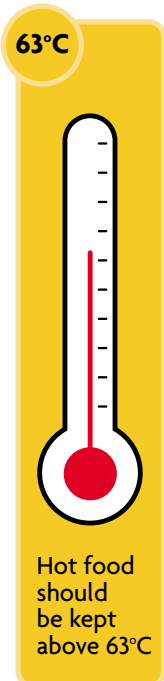
Thorough cooking kills harmful bacteria in food.

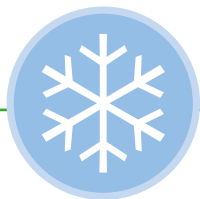
### → What you need to do

- Don't serve any food that isn't properly cooked.
- Once food is cooked, serve it immediately or keep it hot until serving.
- If you're cooking food in advance, cool and chill it quickly (see Chilling on page 6).

### ✓ How to check

- Inspect food to make sure it's thoroughly cooked. For example, check that it's piping hot all the way through and that meat juices run clear.
- Check regularly that hot food is kept hot until serving.





## Chilling

Chilling food stops bacteria from growing and multiplying. Some foods need to be kept chilled to keep them safe, for example food with a 'Use by' date, food that you have cooked and won't serve immediately, or other ready-to-eat food such as prepared salads.

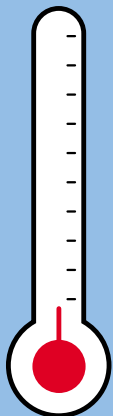
### → What you need to do

- Put food that needs to be chilled in the fridge straight away.
- Cool cooked food as quickly as possible and then put it in the fridge.
- Keep chilled food out of the fridge for the shortest time possible during preparation.
- Keep chilled food cold when it's on display.
- Don't overload the fridge.

### ✓ How to check

- Check chilled food on delivery to make sure it's cold.
- Check that food that needs to be chilled is put in the fridge as soon as it arrives.
- Check regularly that your fridge and display units are cold enough.
- Check the time between cooking food and chilling it. This shouldn't be longer than one to two hours.
- Check how long you keep chilled food out of the fridge on display. This shouldn't be longer than four hours.

8°C



Cold food should be kept at 8°C or below



## Cross-contamination

Cross-contamination is when bacteria spread between food, surfaces or equipment. It's most likely to happen when:

- raw food touches (or drips onto) other food
- raw food touches (or drips onto) equipment or surfaces

So, if raw meat drips onto a cake in the fridge, bacteria will spread from the meat to the cake.

If you cut raw meat on a chopping board, bacteria will spread from the meat to the board and knife. If you then use the same board and knife (without washing them thoroughly) to chop a cucumber, the bacteria will spread from the board and knife to the cucumber.

Hands can also spread bacteria. If you touch raw food and don't wash your hands thoroughly, you can spread bacteria to other things you touch.

By avoiding cross-contamination, you can stop bacteria spreading.

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## What you need to do

- Keep raw and ready-to-eat foods separate.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after touching raw food.
- Clean surfaces and equipment thoroughly before you start to prepare food and after they have been touched by raw food.

## How to check

- Supervise cleaning and food handling.
- Check that raw and ready-to-eat foods are kept apart when they are stored, prepared and displayed.
- Make sure that your staff know how to avoid cross-contamination.

## What should my checks be like?

When you introduce a food safety check, make sure it's:

- **practical** – it should be straightforward to do in the normal running of your business
- **understood** – staff should know how to do the check and why it's important

Remember, you need to do your checks regularly. And make sure your staff report any problems they notice straight away, for example faults with equipment.

If something is going wrong, you must take action to correct it immediately.

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## Is managing food safety expensive?

It doesn't need to be. Often it's just a question of doing the right things at the right time. In fact, some managers say that improving how they manage food safety has saved them money, because it's made their business more efficient and reduced waste.

## Do I need to keep records?

You should write down your main safety checks – you will probably have just a few of these to control the really important food safety problems. This means that you will be able to see if something is going wrong and put it right straight away.

Writing down simple descriptions of food safety checks will help you to do them, or to train the staff who carry out the checks.

Keeping records will also help you to show environmental health officers that you are obeying the law.

## What should I do when I have set up my checks?

Managing food safety is part of the everyday running of your business. When you have the necessary food safety checks in place, look at them regularly to make sure they're working.

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If you make any changes to what your business does, remember to look at your food safety procedures and see whether they need changing. For example, if you decide to sell a different type of food, or prepare food in a different way, you should think about whether this could introduce new food safety problems.

## What do I need to do to obey the law?

You must do the following things:

- Make sure that anyone that handles food is supervised and instructed, and/or trained in food hygiene to an appropriate level.
- Make sure the food you sell is safe.
- Identify where food safety problems could happen.
- Put procedures in place to control food safety problems and make routine checks to make sure they're working.

The law is expected to change in 2004 to make it a legal requirement to keep records of what you do to control food safety problems and how you check that what you do is working. Starting to do this now will make your business safer, and help you to be prepared for the change in the law.

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## Good practice tips

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- 1** Use a fridge thermometer to check the temperature of your fridge regularly. The coldest part of the fridge should be between 0°C and 5°C (32°F and 41°F).
  - 2** You could use a probe thermometer to check if food being kept hot or cold before serving is at a safe temperature. Make sure you always clean the thermometer thoroughly every time you use it, before and after putting it in the food.
  - 3** Remember to keep raw food below ready-to-eat food in the fridge. Or use separate fridges for raw and ready-to-eat food, if possible.
  - 4** An easy way to prevent cross-contamination is to use different chopping boards and different knives for raw and ready-to-eat food. Try using one colour for chopping boards and knives used with raw food, and another colour for those used with ready-to-eat food.
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If you would like more in-depth information about managing food safety, contact your local environmental health service.



## Food Standards Agency Publications

Other publications from the Food Standards Agency include:

- Guide to food hygiene
- Food safety regulations
- A guide to food hazards and your business

To order further copies of this booklet or other publications produced by the Agency, contact Food Standards Agency Publications:

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