

Food Handler Responsibilities

Under the Food Standards Code, Standard 3.2.2 *Food Safety Practices and General Requirements*, food handlers have a responsibility to make sure that they do not contaminate food and make it unsafe or unsuitable for consumption. Food handlers also have specific responsibilities related to their health and hygiene.

Who is a Food Handler?

A food handler is anyone who works in a food business and who either handles food or touches surfaces that are likely to be in contact with food such as cutlery, plates and bowls.

In a food business, a food handler may do many different things such as making, cooking, preparing, serving, packing, displaying and storing food. Food handlers can also be involved in manufacturing, producing, collecting, extracting, processing, treating, transporting, delivering, thawing or preserving food.

Health of Food Handlers

A food handler who has a symptom of a food-borne disease, or knows he or she is suffering from or is a carrier of a food-borne disease, must, if at work:

- report to the supervisor that he or she is suffering from the disease, or knows that he or she is carrying the disease;
- not engage in any food handling where there is a reasonable likelihood of food contamination as a result of the disease; and
- take all practicable measures to prevent food from being contaminated as a result of the disease if continuing to engage in other work on the food premises.

Examples of food borne diseases are hepatitis A, or illnesses caused by giardia, salmonella and campylobacter. Symptoms may include diarrhoea, vomiting, fever, sore throat with fever and jaundice not caused by another reason.

Food Handlers must

- tell their supervisor if they may have contaminated food;
- tell their supervisor if they have any infected skin lesions e.g. an infected skin sore, boil, acne, cut or abrasion, or any discharges from the ears, nose, or eyes; and
- not return to work if suffering from vomiting and/or diarrhoea until the symptoms have stopped for 48 hours.

Personal Hygiene of Food Handlers

A food handler **MUST**:

- wash hands before starting work, before handling food and before putting on gloves;
- wash hands, using soap and warm running water in the hand washing facilities provided, after using the toilet, smoking, coughing, sneezing, blowing nose, touching body parts (face, nose, ears and mouth), handling rubbish or after performing cleaning duties such as mopping. Dry hands thoroughly with disposable paper towels or hand dryer;
- take all practicable measures to prevent unnecessary contact with ready-to-eat food;
- restrain hair and tie back long hair;
- secure hair clips, hair pins, buttons on clothes, jewellery, bandages;
- make sure bandages or dressings on any exposed parts of the body are covered with a waterproof covering.

A food handler **MUST NOT**:

- sneeze, blow, cough over unprotected food or surfaces likely to come into contact with food;
- eat over unprotected food or surfaces likely to come into contact with food;
- spit, smoke or use tobacco or similar preparations in areas where food is handled;
- touch food after touching earrings, hair, nose, ear, eye, skin lesions, saliva, mucus, sweat, blood, money and before washing hands;
- wear jewellery on hands and wrists; and
- urinate or defecate, except in a toilet.

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

Food handlers must tell their supervisor about any infections or conditions that may result in discharges from the ears, nose or eyes that may make food unsafe or unsuitable.

Food handlers with such conditions must make sure that they do not contaminate food. For example, an infected sore must be completely covered by bandage and clothing, or by a waterproof covering if on an area of bare skin.

If a food handler knows or suspects he or she may have contaminated 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 or a bandaid worn by a food handler may have fallen into food, or glass may have broken into or near exposed food.

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