

HAND WASHING FOR THOSE WHO WORK IN FOOD BUSINESSES

Hand washing is such an important aspect of food safety that it is part of the essential information which must be provided for all staff before they even start to work in a food business.

Thorough hand washing and drying removes bacteria and other pathogens from our skin. (Pathogens are any organisms that can cause disease, such as some bacteria and viruses).

Our hands touch many potential sources of pathogens; our own bodies such as our noses, mouths and hair can harbour these germs. Human waste products can also contain high concentrations of pathogens, meaning that hand washing after using the toilet is particularly important for everybody.

Catering staff can pick up pathogens on their hands from the foods they are handling such as raw meat, shellfish and eggs. Hands can also become contaminated when clearing rubbish or carrying out cleaning tasks. Pathogens can survive on our skin for a considerable time and be transferred onto food we are going to eat or onto items which touch food such as work surfaces, utensils and crockery.

Hand washing also removes physical dirt and traces of chemicals, such as contamination from cleaning operations, which could also contaminate food.

WHEN TO WASH HANDS

There are important times when those handling food must wash their hands:-

- Before entering the food area and before touching food
- After handling raw meat, poultry, shellfish, eggs or raw vegetables
- After using the toilet
- After coughing into your hands or using a handkerchief
- After touching your face or hair
- After handling rubbish or cleaning
- After returning to the food room from a break

- After touching a cut or handling a dressing
- After touching items such as phones, light switches, door handles, cash registers and money.

HOW TO WASH HANDS

Here is a [video](#) showing the right way to thoroughly wash hands. It is also important to dry the hands thoroughly after washing. Pathogens can survive in the water droplets on the hands and be easily transferred onto the next item touched.

It is important to note that water temperature does not have a direct effect on efficacy of washing (i.e. hot enough to kill organisms is too hot for comfort), but if the temperature is comfortable then washing will be more thorough. This [article](#) from the Journal of Food Protection explores this further.

EQUIPMENT & FACILITIES FOR HAND WASHING

By law the owners of food businesses need to provide their staff with a means of washing and drying their hands. There need to be a sufficient number of wash basins designated for only hand washing. Best practice is to locate these wash basins near toilets as well as at the entrance to the food handling area. According to the size of the food area, other wash basins may also be needed, for example in areas where ready to eat foods are being prepared or where raw meat or raw vegetables are handled. Legislation states that the wash basins need to have hot and cold running water as well as materials for cleaning hands and hygienically drying hands. Best practice is the provision of soap and a means of drying such as paper towels and a bin for used towels. It is also good practice to have taps which are not hand operated to avoid contamination. Mixer taps also mean that water temperature can be controlled easily, preventing scalding.

OTHER ASPECTS OF HAND HYGIENE

Those handling food should keep their fingernails short and not wear nail varnish or false nails and should follow their organisation's policy about wearing of jewellery. Pathogens can collect in the dirt under long fingernails or within jewellery and be a source of contamination. Also, chips of nail varnish, gel nails, false nails and jewellery can fall into food and contaminate it. Any cuts on the hands should be covered with a blue waterproof plaster

Staff in some food businesses use gloves for some food handling operations. However, gloves are not a substitute for effective hand washing and gloved hands can still transfer pathogens – for example from raw to ready to eat foods, and can lead to a false sense of security for food handlers. A food business needs to provide clear instructions about when gloves need to be changed. Hands need to be washed before putting on gloves and also after they are removed, as hands can become contaminated in the removal process.

Some food businesses elect to use hand gels or hand wipes. These are not a replacement for hand washing as they are not as effective at removing soil from hands as thorough washing with soap and water.

HAND WASHING AS PART OF YOUR FOOD SAFETY POLICY.

Hand washing is a very important part of the personal hygiene regime in a food business and a fundamental part of an organisation's food safety culture. It protects consumers by helping to keep food safe to eat and helping to prevent food poisoning. Food businesses have a duty to provide hand washing facilities and to ensure that their staff know the right way to wash their hands and the times when hands must be washed. Signs to remind staff about hand washing are useful, but equally important is the correct supervision of staff, with supervisors and managers leading by example by washing their own hands at the appropriate times.

Hand washing for guests should be encouraged, as they may handle food such as bread with dirty hands and contaminate foods prior to eating. Many businesses in the leisure industry give guests access to hand gel prior to entering restaurants to reduce the risk of norovirus spread.