Food Safety Newsletter

Winter 2022

Welcome

Welcome to the second edition of the City of Rockingham's six monthly Food Safety Newsletter. This newsletter aims to provide up-to-date food safety and regulatory information to food handlers and food businesses within the City of Rockingham. Please contact customer@rockingham.wa.gov.au if you have any feedback or suggestions for future editions of the Food Safety Newsletter.

Topics

- Hand washing
- The use of tea towels within a food premises
- The importance of temperature control
- A handy guide to cleaning and sanitising

Hand washing

Good hand hygiene is one of the ways that food handlers can prevent food contamination and reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

When to wash your hands

- before food handling
- before working with ready-to-eat food after handling raw food
- after using the toilet
- after smoking, coughing, sneezing, using a handkerchief or tissue, eating or drinking
- after touching your hair, scalp, nose or any other part of the body
- after any other activity that can contaminate hands e.g. handling garbage, touching animals, cleaning or handling money.

How to wash your hands

Hands should be washed in a designated hand washing sink only. To wash hands effectively:

- wet hands with warm running water
- lather hands with soap, including fingers, palms, wrists, back of hands and nails for at least 15 seconds
- rinse hands thoroughly with warm running water
- turn off tap with elbow or use paper towel if tap is not hands-free
- thoroughly dry hands with a single-use paper towel.

The use of tea towels within a food premises

The use of tea towels is discouraged within a food premises. Tea towels are often used by food handlers to quickly wipe over utensils, plates, benches, hands and even floors, and can spread bacteria from one surface to another. Disposable paper towels should be used to dry hands or to wipe plates when plating. Fresh cleaning cloths are recommended for wiping surfaces with cleaning and sanitising chemicals when needed. These must be changed when dirty and not re-used on multiple surfaces (e.g. the bench and floor).

Food handlers have been observed re-using tea towels to cover food in storage which can lead to cross-contamination of food. Food in storage should be covered with lids or cling wrap.

If tea towels must be used to dry dishes:

- use a freshly laundered tea towel for each batch of dishes
- when a tea towel is wet, replace it with a clean, dry one
- never dry out a wet tea towel and re-use it to dry dishes without first laundering it.

The importance of temperature control

Temperature control of potentially hazardous foods is an essential practice that prevents the multiplication of harmful food poisoning bacteria, which thrive at temperatures between 5°C - 60°C. The Food Safety Standards require potentially hazardous foods to be stored, displayed and transported at safe temperatures of 5°C or colder, or 60°C or hotter. Food handlers should also aim to maintain safe temperatures for potentially hazardous foods during preparation, where possible.

What are potentially hazardous foods?


raw meats, cooked meats and food containing meat


dairy products and foods containing dairy products


seafood (excluding live seafood) and food containing seafood


processed fruits and vegetables, such as prepared salads and ready-to-eat fruit packs


cooked rice and pasta


processed foods containing eggs, beans, nuts or other protein-rich food


foods that contain any of the above (e.g. sandwiches, rice salads, pasta salads).

How can I ensure that potentially hazardous foods are kept under temperature control?

Regular temperature checks

Food businesses should perform regular temperature checks of refrigeration units, freezers and hot display units using a thermometer, to ensure that they are working effectively. Businesses should not rely on reading the temperature display of these units, as they often do not reflect the temperature of food stored inside.

Cooling food

Potentially hazardous foods should be cooled rapidly in shallow containers. The temperature of cooked food should fall from 60°C - 21°C within two hours, then to 5°C within the next four hours. Use your probe thermometer to check whether foods are able to be cooled safely within these time frames.

Reheating and keeping food hot

Food should be reheated rapidly to at least 60°C. Cooked food should be kept hot at 60°C or above (e.g. in a bain-marie). Temperature checks of cooked food are required to ensure that the unit or appliance is able to maintain this temperature.

An alternative method for temperature control – the 2-hour/4-hour rule

Following the 2-hour/4-hour rule can keep potentially hazardous foods safe, even when they are out of refrigeration. Food businesses can use an electronic timer, colour coded stickers or plates, or a whiteboard/chart to record or keep track of when and for how long an item has been out of refrigeration. Your food business should have a verifiable tracking system, should you wish to use the 2-hour/4-hour rule for temperature control.

The time between 5°C and 60°C is cumulative – which means you need to add up every time the food has been out of the fridge, including during preparation, storage, transport and display.

How to apply the 2-hour/4-hour rule:

Total time between 5°C - 60°C	
Less than two hours	Food can be used or put back into refrigeration at 5°C
Two – four hours	Food must be used straight away and cannot be put back in the refrigerator
Over four hours	Throw away

Using a thermometer to monitor temperatures

Any business that prepares, handles or sells potentially hazardous food is required to have a probe thermometer in food preparation areas which is accurate to ±1°C.

A simple guide to probe thermometer use:

- use warm soapy water and an alcohol wipe to clean and sanitise probe thermometers before and after use
- place the probe into the thickest part of the food and wait until the temperature stabilises before reading it
- measure packaged chilled food by placing the thermometer lengthwise along or between packages
- measure the temperature of different foods in your refrigerator or display unit to check if there are spots where food is not at the right temperature
- keep your thermometer in good condition, have it calibrated regularly, replace flat batteries, and repair or replace it if it breaks.

A handy guide to cleaning and sanitising

The terms cleaning and sanitising are often used together and some food business workers think they mean the same thing – but they don't. Cleaning and sanitising are two separate processes.

Cleaning

Cleaning is the removal of visible dirt and matter and is achieved using detergent, water and agitation (scrubbing, wiping, and washing). Cleaning removes dirt and grease, but does not kill bacteria or other micro-organisms.

Effective cleaning must occur before sanitising, as sanitisers do not work as effectively if visible dirt has not been removed.

Some handy cleaning hints

- it is important to clean and sanitise the cleaning equipment (including mops and buckets) or next time you clean you'll only be contaminating
- any dirty water should be poured down the cleaner's sink, never the hand basin or food preparation sink
- cleaning chemicals should be clearly labelled in designated containers and stored in a separate area of the food premises, so that food or equipment cannot be contaminated.

Sanitising

Sanitisers (also called disinfectants) are substances capable of destroying micro-organisms including those bacteria capable of causing food poisoning.

Used properly, sanitisers can reduce surface contamination by bacteria to a safe level.

Remember:
Detergents remove dirt and grease.
Sanitisers kill bacteria.
Both are needed for effective cleaning.

Sanitisers take time to work properly and it is important to read the manufacturer's instructions carefully before use. You must check the label to find the correct dilution, application, method of use (i.e. no-rinse or rinse off), contact time, safety precautions, shelf life and storage information for the product.

Effective cleaning and sanitising

The Food Standards Code requires all items that come in to contact with food, must be effectively cleaned and sanitised using the following process:

Four step process for cleaning and sanitising	
Step one - Preparation	Remove loose dirt and food particles Rinse with warm water.
Step two - Cleaning	Wash with hot water and detergent Rinse with clean water
Step three - Sanitising (to destroy bacteria and pathogens)	Treat with very hot (>77°C) clean water (e.g. using commercial dishwasher) or apply sanitiser as directed on the label.
Step four - Air drying	Leave benches, counters and equipment to air dry. The most hygienic way to dry equipment is in a draining rack.