

PERSONAL HYGIENE

Objectives

At the end of this module, trainees should be able to :

- a) Explain the importance of personal hygiene in food handling
- b) Describe the sources of contamination from people, including injuries, personal clothing or habits and how risks can be eliminated
- c) Explain the importance of protective clothing
- d) Explain the risks associated with food being handled by carriers of, or sufferers from food poisoning or food-borne diseases

5.1 INTRODUCTION TO PERSONAL HYGIENE

Most people carry some type of disease-causing organism at one time or another. Therefore food handlers have a moral and legal responsibility to observe high standards of personal cleanliness to ensure that they do not contaminate food and cause illness. Food handlers should be in good health and have clean habits to prevent the direct contamination of food.

5.1.1 Sources of micro-organisms from man

Man can easily contaminate food by micro-organisms found on different parts of his body:

- ▶ Hair
- ▶ Nose, mouth and ears
- ▶ Hands and finger nails
- ▶ Skin, cuts and grazes
- ▶ Jewellery, perfume and smoking
- ▶ Personal clothing

At the same time, man can excrete food poisoning organisms or carry them on their body as explained in Module 4 Part 4.5.2 on Sources of Bacterial Contamination.

**GOOD PERSONAL HYGIENE IS A MUST IN THE PREVENTION OF
CONTAMINATION.**

5.2 CONTAMINATION BY THE HAIR, NOSE, MOUTH AND EARS

5.2.1 Hair

Hair contains bacteria. It falls out naturally - one can lose up to 100 hairs a day. This makes the head a likely source of contamination as the scalp often contains pathogenic micro-organisms such as *Staphylococcus aureus*. Therefore steps must be taken to prevent contamination from this source.

- ⇒ Hair should be clean, tied back and covered when handling food.
- ⇒ A food handler should not scratch his head when there is food around.
- ⇒ Combing of hair should be done before wearing workclothes and not in a food preparation area
- ⇒ After having a haircut, food handlers should wash their hair before

5.2.2 The nose, mouth and ears

Many people have *Staphylococcus aureus* (food poisoning bacteria) in the nose and mouth which can be easily transmitted to food by :

- ▶ Coughing over food
- ▶ Sneezing over food
- ▶ Spitting
- ▶ Tasting food with fingers or unwashed spoon
- ▶ Biting nails or licking fingers
- ▶ Eating sweets or chewing gum
- ▶ Blowing

Discharges from the ears, eyes and nose may contaminate food and employees must report immediately to management. Medical clearance to start work should normally be required.

5.2.3 Elimination of the risk of food contamination by hair, nose, mouth and ears

The following personal hygiene rules must be observed when handling food :



- **Blow into bag**
- **Lick fingers**
- **Lick fingers before picking up sheets of wrapping paper**
- **Smoke**
- **Spit**
- **Eat sweets etc**
- **Blow your nose close to food**
- **Taste food with fingers**
- **Touch mouth**
- **Pick nose**



- **Cough or sneeze away from food**
- **Wash hands after blowing nose**
- **Use tasting spoons only once**
- **Keep hair clean and tied back**
- **Wear head covering**

5.3 CONTAMINATION BY THE HANDS & FINGERNAILS

5.3.1 Hands

Food poisoning bacteria carried on the hands and transferred into food during its preparation are one of the most common causes of food contamination. Therefore, hands must be kept very clean at all times.

5.3.2 Fingernails

As fingernails may harbour bacteria, they must be kept short and clean. Nail varnish may contaminate food and should not be used. Licking the fingers before picking up sheets of wrapping paper is a particularly bad habit.

5.3.3 Elimination of the risk of food contamination by the hands and fingernails



- Wear false nails
- Wear nail varnish
- Use sinks used for food preparation to wash hands



- **Keep hands clean**
- **Keep nails clean**
- **Keep nails short**

The correct handwashing procedure

Correct handwashing is an important and effective means of preventing the spread of infection to food during handling.

The steps involved in the handwashing procedure are summarised below :

1. Moisten the hands and forearms with water (preferably warm)
2. Apply soap (preferably liquid and antibacterial)
3. Rub hands for 20 seconds. A good lather is required and the wrists, forearms, palms, back of hand and in between the fingers should all receive attention.
4. Rinse well with fingertips pointing down
5. Dry hands with a hot hand dryer or paper towel.
6. Throw paper towel in plastic-lined waste container (if available)

In any food business, adequate handwashing facilities must be available to enable food handlers reach them quickly and easily from where they are working

► When should the hands be washed ?

Since infectious diseases can be greatly reduced by proper handwashing, it is important that hands are always kept clean. Food handlers must wash their hands regularly throughout the working day and especially:

After :

- a) Entering food room
- b) Using WC
- c) Handling raw food
- d) Touching hair, nose or face
- e) Smoking, eating, coughing
- f) Sneezing and blowing the nose
- g) Cleaning
- h) Handling waste
- i) Changing a dressing
- j) Dealing with an ill customer

5.4 CONTAMINATION BY THE SKIN, CUTS & GRAZES

5.4.1 The Skin

Even clean skin has a lot of bacteria living on it. Spots are caused by bacteria in the pores of the skin. Body odour is caused by bacteria living on stale sweat. Hence, food handlers must wash regularly to remove these bacteria.

Never scratch the skin, especially spots, as this will leave bacteria on your hands which can then be passed on to food.

5.4.2 Cuts and Grazes

Any skin infection (cuts, grazes, spots) provide an ideal place for bacterial growth, especially *Staphylococcus aureus*, a food poisoning bacteria.

- ⇒ All cuts and wounds should be covered with a waterproof dressing before starting to work with food. This protects the food from contamination.
- ⇒ The dressing should be brightly coloured - blue or green - so that it can be seen easily if it falls off.

⇒ If a dressing must fall into food, the food must be thrown away.

5.4.3 Elimination of the risk of food contamination by the skin, cuts and grazes



- **Scratch skin, especially spots**
- **Leave cuts & wounds unprotected**



- **Cover cuts and wounds with waterproof dressings**
- **Wear brightly coloured dressing – blue / green**
- **Replace above when loose**
- **Shower regularly**

5.5 CONTAMINATION BY JEWELLERY, PERFUME AND SMOKING

5.5.1 Jewellery and perfume

Jewellery, including watches, earrings and rings should not be worn whilst working with food. It harbours bacteria and may fall off into the food.

Strong-smelling perfume or aftershave should not be worn by food handlers as it may make food smell

5.5.2 Smoking

It is illegal to smoke during food handling. Not only is this to prevent cigarette ends and ash contaminating food, but also because :

- Bacteria are transferred from lips to food
- Smoking encourages coughing
- Smoking increases the risk of physical contamination
- Smoking creates an unpleasant atmosphere

5.6 PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

Outdoor clothing is frequently contaminated with food poisoning bacteria particularly if it has been worn in congested areas such as public transport.

⇒ Protective clothing must therefore be worn when working with food. Food handlers must be aware that protective clothing is worn to protect the food from risk of contamination and to keep their own clothes clean

5.6.1 Properties of protective clothing

Good protective clothing has the following characteristics :

- Protective clothing must be clean and preferably light-coloured so that any dirt will show.
- Clothes should be well fitting for comfort and have no pockets.
- Work clothes must give good protection and cover all other clothes.
- Fastenings which will not come off in food are preferred (press studs for example).
- Suitable footwear should be worn to prevent slipping and to protect the feet. Do not wear sandals or open footwear in a food preparation area.
- Hats or other forms of head covering should form part of protective clothing.
- Protective clothing should not be worn outside the food premises, not used to travel to and from work and not worn during activities other than work.
- Outdoor clothing and personal effects must not be brought into food rooms unless stored in suitable lockers.
- Protective clothing should not be hung in sanitary accommodation.

Other protective clothing includes :

Hair nets

Disposable plastic gloves

Washable head and neck covering if your job involves carrying raw meat carcasses, to avoid contaminating the meat.

IMPORTANT : Food handlers must wear suitable protective clothing.

5.7 GENERAL HEALTH & REPORTING OF ILLNESS

5.7.1 General Health

The maintenance of good health is essential to prevent the introduction of germs into food preparation areas.

Food handlers should be in good health in all aspects from oral hygiene to general fitness. To keep physically fit, adequate rest, exercise, fresh air and a wholesome diet are essential.

5.7.2 Reporting of illness

Food handlers should report any illness, however mild, to :

- Management / Employer in case food handler is working for food company
- Local Health Authority if food handler is self-employed and operates his own food business.

Management / local health authorities will decide whether the person is fit to work.

☞ Diarrhoea and vomiting

- Any food handler having symptoms of food poisoning (vomiting, diarrhoea) must not handle food. The food handler must notify management or seek advice from local health authorities who must exclude them from any work to prevent the spread of infection and reduce the risk of food contamination by pathogenic micro-organisms.

- In a food company, the employer must then inform the local public health authority if there is any employee suffering from food poisoning or a food-borne disease.
- Food handlers who have consumed a meal known to have caused food poisoning or live in the same household as a confirmed case or have suffered from diarrhoea or vomiting whilst abroad should also report to management/ local health authorities.
- Food handlers who have had food poisoning should not return to work until they are cured. In fact, some people who have had food poisoning may still harbour the bacteria in their gut even though they no longer have any symptoms. These people are called carriers. They can still pass bacteria on to others through poor hygiene during food preparation or processing.

It is very important for food handlers to inform management or seek advice from local health authorities immediately if they are suffering from :

1. a cold
2. a sore throat
3. a septic wound
4. diarrhoea
5. an upset stomach
6. sickness

Persons with skin infections, sores, heavy colds and ear or eye discharge should be excluded until medical clearance has been obtained.

5.8 REFERENCES

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