**Section 2 Part 2 - Personal Hygiene**

Food handlers can be the source of two types of food safety hazard:

•Pathogenic bacteria (particularly if poor habits are adopted and personal hygiene standards are poor)

• Foreign body hazards

It is important to consider what controls can be used to minimise / eliminate these hazards.

Food handlers have a moral and legal responsibility to observe high standards of personal hygiene and to ensure they do not contaminate food.

The law states "every person working in a food handling area shall maintain a high degree of personal cleanliness and shall wear suitable, clean and, where appropriate protective clothing".

**Personal hygiene**

Food handlers are potentially the biggest hazard in a food business; therefore, personal hygiene is vital hygiene control within the business.

Bacteria live in or on our bodies, and as our body temperature is 37°C, which is an ideal temperature for the growth of most food poisoning organisms, good personal hygiene is an essential control to ensure that bacteria aren't transferred by us.

Therefore food handlers should keep themselves scrupulously clean and shower daily.

**Why is hand hygiene so important?**

Hands get everywhere; they are the main method of transferring contamination, which is why they must be regularly washed.

Where possible, food should not be handled with bare hands, instead tongs could be used to pick up foods. Even if foods are not handled, contamination could be caused by touching equipment, utensils and surfaces during the day with your hands.

It is therefore essential that hands are washed regularly, so they are clean at all times.

This will ensure that:

•All harmful bacteria and substances are removed from hands

•Further contamination and cross contamination will not occur

**How should hands be washed?**

* The correct hand washing procedure is essential to prevent contamination. Hands should always be washed in the basin provided (never the sink used for washing equipment or food as this leads to contamination).
* A non hand operated water supply is preferred with comfortably hot water and unscented liquid soap (A bar of soap may carry bacteria from the last person who handled it).
* Once wet, soap should be rubbed vigorously into hands, ensuring each hand is cleaned, including the fingertips, between the fingers and the wrist and forearm. 15-20 seconds should be spent rubbing soap in.
* It may also be necessary to use a nail brush to clean under nails, particularly after carrying out tasks such as handling raw meat or visiting the toilet. If using a nail brush it must be scrupulously clean, as a dirty nail brush can introduce more bacteria onto the hand.
* Rinse hands with clear running water to remove all soap and dirt before drying them.
* Hands should be dried in a hygienic manner such as an air dryer, paper towel or clean roller towel. Cloths, t-towels or overalls should never be used as this causes contamination.
* Some organisations may require use of a hand disinfectant as well.
* Hands and wrists should be washed thoroughly throughout the day.
* Finger nails should be cut short to prevent harbouring bacteria. They must be kept clean with no nail varnish as it can chip and flake off into food.

Always wash your hands:

• After using the WC

• Before starting work and when returning to work after a break during your working day

• After eating, smoking, blowing your nose or touching your mouth, ears or hair

• After handling waste food or refuse

• Between handling raw food and high risk foods

• After carrying out any cleaning activity

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Exercise

From the list below, select 4 instances when you should wash your hands

* After using the WC
* After eating, smoking or blowing your nose
* Before starting work and when returning to work after a break
* Before touching your mouth, ears and hair
* After touching your mouth, ears and hair
* Before handling waste food or refuse

**Appropriate protective clothing**

All food handlers should wear clean, washable or disposable protective clothing which is ideally light coloured.

**Protective clothing should:**

• Be in good condition (without any rips and tears which could lead to frayed cottons contaminating food)

• Ideally have external pockets and no buttons (Press studs and Velcro fastenings are preferable as they reduce the risk of physical hazards)

• Always be worn in the food room

What you are expected to wear will depend on your job role; however the purpose of protective clothing remains the same - It is there to protect the food from you.

It should therefore be worn correctly, only whilst at work and should completely cover your ordinary clothing.

Dirty over clothes can harbour bacteria, which can be transferred to food if the clothing touches it.

**Appropriate protective clothing**

Outdoor clothes and footwear should not be worn or kept in food rooms.

Protective clothing must be stored correctly away from food, equipment and packaging.

Footwear should:

* Have low heels
* Be enclosed
* Have non-slip soles
* Be kept clean

Hair:

* The average human head sheds about 50 hairs each day and these, along with bacteria from the scalp, may contaminate food.
* Certain controls will be in place in your workplace to control the risk of hair dropping into food.

These controls may require you to:

* Wear clean head coverings / hats which completely enclose the hair
* Wear nets to cover beards and moustaches
* Have long hair tied back

Never comb your hair whilst wearing protective clothing as this is when it is most likely to fall out. If this is done when protective clothing is being worn, hair can fall onto the shoulders and then onto food.

Hats should always be put on before protective clothing to avoid getting hair on the outside of the protective clothing.

Gloves:

* Some food handling tasks may require you to wear food grade gloves.
* Hands should be washed before and after putting them on.
* Gloves should be changed regularly; especially if there is a risk they may have become contaminated e.g. between changing from handling raw meat to high risk foods.
* Ensure the gloves are in good condition and are not ripped, as bits of the glove may fall into the food and contaminate it.
* Do not wear gloves that have been designated for cleaning tasks to handle food.

Jewellery, Perfume and Make Up:

* Do not wear watches, brooches, jewelled rings or earrings as they can harbour dirt and bacteria and could drop into food.
* Avoid strong smelling perfumes and heavy makeup, as these can taint food products, especially those in high fat e.g. butter and cheese.

The nose and mouth:

Spit and mucous can carry harmful bacteria. It is possible to contaminate food by:

* Sneezing
* Picking your nose
* Touching your mouth and then food
* Biting your nails
* Licking fingers or blowing into bags

Cuts and Spots:

* These provide an ideal place for bacteria to multiply.
* They should be covered with a detectable (usually blue), clean, waterproof dressing.
* Remember even a clean cut that has almost healed is a breeding ground for bacteria - keep it covered.
* Ensure the first aid box is regularly restocked with blue plasters.

Reporting illness:

Nobody suffering from the following should handle food:

• Diarrhoea or vomiting

• Skin infections or heavy colds

• Discharges from the eyes or ears

Notify your supervisor if you or a member of your household is ill with this type of illness.

Some cases need medical clearance before you can return to work as some people may be 'carriers', carrying the food poisoning bacteria in their systems after recovering from an illness, without showing any symptoms

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Exercise

Which of these illnesses MUST you notify your supervisor of? Select 5 correct answers:

Diarrhoea

Mild back pain

Discharges from the eyes or ears

Skin infections

Ingrowing toe nail

Broken heart

Heavy colds

Vomiting

Headache

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**Unhygienic habits**

Many actions and habits appear harmless, but in a food premises they could cause contamination.

* Always wash hands regularly
* Always dry hands on the correct towels
* Do not pick your nose or wipe your nose on your sleeve
* Do not spit, cough or sneeze over food
* Do not blow / breathe onto glassware & cutlery to help polish them
* Always use a clean spoon each time to test and taste food, never use your fingers
* Do not lick your fingers to separate papers, bags etc.
* Wash your hands after smoking in the designated area

**--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------**Exercise

Select true or false in answer to the question "Which of the following should food handlers do?"

Wash hands regularly

Dry hands on the correct towels

Wipe your nose on your sleeve

Do not cough and sneeze over food

Blow or breathe onto glassware to help polish them

Use a clean spoon each time to test and taste food, never your fingers

Lick your fingers to separate papers, bags etc.

Wash your hands after smoking in the designated area

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Module re-cap

In this module we have seen that:

•People are a source of harmful bacteria and can contaminate food if personal hygiene standards are poor

•You must observe high standards of personal hygiene and follow company rules