

Health and hygiene requirements of food handlers

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

A food handler may be involved in food preparation, production, cooking, display, packing, storage or service.

Responsibilities of food handlers

Under the Food Standards Code, a food handler must take all reasonable measures not to handle food or food surfaces in a way that is likely to compromise the safety and suitability of food.

Food handlers also have specific responsibilities relating to health and hygiene.

Health requirements

Any food handler with symptoms or a diagnosis of an illness (such as vomiting, diarrhoea or fever) must:

- report that they are ill to their employer or supervisor
- not handle food if there is a reasonable likelihood of food contamination as a result of the illness
- if continuing to engage in other work on the food premises, take all practicable measures to prevent food from being contaminated
- notify a supervisor if they know or suspect they may have contaminated food.

Effective hand washing

Hand washing is one of the most important actions you can take to prevent foodborne illness.

Food handlers must:

- wash their hands using hot, soapy water and dry them thoroughly with single-use paper towels
- wash their hands whenever they are likely to be a source of contamination (after using the toilet, smoking, coughing, sneezing, using a handkerchief, eating, drinking or touching the hair, scalp or body)
- wash their hands before handling ready-to-eat food and after handling raw food.

Hygiene requirements

Food handlers must:

- not eat, sneeze, blow, cough, spit or smoke around food or food surfaces
- take all practicable measures to prevent unnecessary contact with ready-to-eat food

- tie back long hair, and take all practical measures to prevent hair contaminating food
- ensure clothing is clean
- cover bandages and dressings on exposed parts of the body with a waterproof covering
- remove loose jewellery
- avoid wearing jewellery and decorations, including nail polish and false nails, on the hands and wrists.

Use of gloves

The Food Standards Code does not require food handlers to use gloves. Even when wearing gloves, in many situations it may be preferable to use utensils such as tongs or spoons.

Gloves must be removed, discarded and replaced with a new pair in the below circumstances:

- before handling food
- before handling ready-to-eat food and after handling raw food
- after using the toilet, smoking, coughing, sneezing, using a handkerchief, eating, drinking or touching the hair, scalp or body.

Employer responsibilities

A food business must:

- ensure food handlers do not handle food if there is a possibility of contamination
- maintain easily accessible handwashing facilities and supplies of hot running water, soap and single-use paper towels
- ensure all food handlers have appropriate skills and knowledge in food safety and food hygiene. This can be done by either completing a food handler training course, or being able to clearly demonstrate their skills and knowledge.

Food Safety Supervisor

Under the Food Standards Code (Standard 3.2.2) all food handlers must have general skills and knowledge in food safety and hygiene. The Code also requires that certain businesses in the hospitality and retail food service sector appoint at least one trained Food Safety Supervisor (FSS) who can advise and supervise food handlers.

FSS training is tied to nationally recognised units of competency in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) System.

For more information how to become a Food Safety Supervisor, including training requirements, visit foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/fss

More information

- Visit foodauthority.nsw.gov.au
- Email food.contact@dpi.nsw.gov.au
- Phone 1300 552 406