



UNIT-2 What is Food Hygiene?

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- Understand the importance of high food hygiene standards
- Discuss the links between food hygiene and the risk of food poisoning
- Proactively control food hygiene standards in the workplace

Unit 2

What is Food Hygiene?

Food hygiene is an essential aspect of food safety. It refers to the processes that directly involve food – including storage, preparation, and cooking. Good practices in these areas ensure that customers receive food that's safe and as described.

The Key Elements of Food Hygiene are:

- **Personal Hygiene.** This includes handwashing, protective clothing, illness procedures, and other duties (such as avoiding smoking).
- **Preventing Cross-Contamination.** This includes preventing bacterial, physical, chemical, and allergenic contamination, particularly by having appropriate equipment in place (such as separate cutting boards).
- **Cleaning Procedures.** Thorough cleaning of the kitchen, equipment, and kitchenware (including plates and cutlery) is vital.
- **Allergen Control.** All businesses must clearly explain which foods are allergenic and must prevent allergens from cross-contaminating other food.
- **Safe Storage of Food.** This includes storage locations and containers, a **FIFO system**, labelling, and temperature control.
- **Cooking Temperatures.** Businesses must ensure they cook and hold food at appropriate temperatures to prevent bacterial risks.

Everyone who works with food is responsible for ensuring that consumers are protected from contaminated food and the risk of food poisoning, which causes extreme discomfort, absence from work or school and, in some cases, death.

People get sick from food poisoning because the food they've eaten has contained bacteria, viruses or chemicals. It can take from an hour to a few days to develop food poisoning, depending on the cause, and the best way of preventing food poisoning is to use safe food handling practices.

Bacteria are the biggest problem, because they are so common, and are found in soil, on animals, people and even clothes. In the kitchen, bacteria often come from vegetables and raw meat. Sometimes these bacteria can move from raw ingredients to cooked food, in a process called cross contamination.

The way that these germs can move includes:

- From hands to food.
- From cutting boards, knives and other utensils on to food.
- From one food to another, especially from raw to cooked.

Once bacteria are in a food, they can increase their numbers quickly. They just need the right conditions. This means a temperature of between 5°C and 60°C, (sometimes called the danger zone), time and water.

There are six keys to breaking this chain of food poisoning:

- Someone who is responsible for every aspect of food preparation and sales.
- Each person handling or preparing the food must know, about and practise safe food handling.
- Making sure that everything (utensils) used in preparing the food is clean and germ free.
- Correct and safe food preparation.
- Correct and safe food storage.
- Displaying food safely.

Food Hygiene Involves

- Preventing the spread of infection by people who handle food.
- Ensuring that food preparation areas, equipment and surfaces are clean.

Aims of Food Hygiene

- Protect food from risks of contamination.
- Prevent bacteria from multiplying to levels resulting in ill-health.
- Destroy bacteria in food through adequate cooking or processing.

The Benefits of Food Hygiene

- Return of business through satisfied customers.
- Good reputation.
- Compliance with the law.
- High quality food and increased shelf life of food.
- Good working environment for staff, boosting staff morale and job satisfaction.

The Cost of Poor Hygiene

- Food poisoning outbreaks and sometimes death.
- Customer complaints.
- Wastage of goods due to spoilage.
- Pest infection.
- Suspension of trading by local health authorities.
- Fines and cost of legal action by food poisoning sufferers.
- Loss of reputation through word of mouth or media exposure.

Approach to the Problem

- Preventing food being contaminated.
- Killing bacteria.
- Preventing bacteria growth and multiplication.

Sources of Contamination

- People (hands, mouth, nose, anus, skin).
- Clothes.
- Utensils - (dirty utensils, especially those used for raw then cooked foods without adequate cleaning and sanitising in between, tea towels).
- Raw foods - (especially red meat, chicken, seafood, vegetables, water).
- Flies and pests.
- Garbage.

Prevention

If we are to adopt the main principles of food hygiene we must adhere to the following practices.

- Develop and maintain high standards of personal hygiene.
- Avoid cross-contamination of foods.
- Establish and maintain correct storage conditions.
- Clean and sanitise all utensils and equipment used in the handling and preparation of food.
- Control pests.

Personal Hygiene

Why Food Hygiene?

Food hygiene is concerned with every aspect of food production. The main aim is to promote health. This is the responsibility of everyone in the food industry, from managers to cleaners. All must take great care when it comes to handling and preparing food to prevent unnecessary waste of food, due to spoilage or contamination by moulds, bacteria, physical damage or vermin.

Most people think that food hygiene is simply common sense, they try to do the right thing and they certainly do not set out to poison anyone. However, when you work in the food industry you must consider a number of important issues to do with your approach to personal hygiene and kitchen hygiene.

Where Does Good Hygiene Begin?

Personal Hygiene

One of the keys to safe food is good personal hygiene of the people who prepare and serve it. The bacteria that can cause food poisoning can easily transfer from the hands and clothes of the people who handle it to food, so it is important that everyone who handles food has high levels of personal hygiene.

As well as hands, clothes and other body parts, hair and jewellery can contain and spread bacteria to food. Important, too is the health of the people handling food. People with illnesses and those with wounds like cuts and scratches can spread illness through food without knowing it. Good hygiene begins with the attitudes and knowledge of all food service workers. It starts with personal hygiene

and caring for yourself. The outward signs are a healthy body and attention to grooming.

Personal Hygiene and Conscious Body Habits

As a food service worker you are responsible for:

1. Practicing Personal Cleanliness:

- Having a bath or shower daily.
- Wearing clean undergarments daily.
- Using a deodorant but avoid the use of overpowering perfumes.
- Washing hair regularly.
- Shaving at least daily, for males without beards.
- Beards, if worn, should also be washed daily and kept trim.
- Cleaning teeth frequently to ensure oral hygiene and fresh breath.
- Keeping fingernails clean, neat and well-trimmed. Nail polish should not be worn when preparing food.

2. Preparing yourself Systematically for Work:

- Brush hair and secure it off the face and in such a way that hair will not contact food or surfaces used for preparing food.
- Wear clothing which will not cause contamination of foods.
- Do not smoke in food preparation or serving areas.
- Wash hands and fingernails thoroughly before commencing work. This is vital because hands are the major contact between the food handler and food.
- Wear a clean apron.
- Wear limited jewellery, plain band type rings and plain sleeper style earrings.

Personal Hygiene and Unconscious Body Habits

Following these fundamental rules for good personal hygiene ensures basic standards. However, a food handler also needs to be aware of unconscious body habits and must avoid actions such as scratching or rubbing the head, nose or other body parts, stroking hair/beards, picking pimples, licking fingers when tasting food and the like. Ordinarily, these unconscious body habits do not create problems, but when handling foods for the public, it is not only unprofessional behaviour but is potentially dangerous.

The Food Handler as a Source of Harmful Bacteria

All this focus on the cleanliness of the food handler is because the human body provides a rich environment for micro-organisms to live in. Micro-organisms (eg. bacteria) are to be found in and on the body. Most of these bacteria are harmless. Many even have an important role to play in maintaining health. (eg. gut bacteria manufacturing Vitamin K).

However some are harmful and can cause food poisoning. Apparently healthy people may be carrying pathogenic bacteria without showing any signs of illness.

Everyone has to assume that they may be carrying food poisoning bacteria and so take precautions against spreading the disease. It is estimated that 50% of the population carry *Staphylococcus Aureus* in their mouths/noses. *Staph Aureus* may also be present in infected cuts and pimples. This food poisoning bacteria may be spread to food by a food handler coughing or sneezing over food, tasting food using fingers or working with an infected cut.

Salmonella and *Clostridium perfringens* can be present in the intestine of seemingly healthy people. Inadequate washing of hands after going to the toilet may result in faecal material being transferred to the food.

If healthy people are carrying bacteria, then people suffering from nose, throat or chest infections, intestinal upset or skin infections will be shedding bacteria at an even greater rate. If you are sick you should not handle food. Report any abnormal health conditions. Keep cuts or burns covered with a clean waterproof dressing.

Hand-Washing

Always wash your hands before handling food. Washing hands is not just a quick wetting under the tap. Adequate washing of hands involves these steps:

- Using the hand basin, wet hands with hot water.
- Apply soap. Lather and thoroughly rub over hands, wrists and fingers. A nail brush is useful.
- Continue washing action for sixty seconds.
- Rinse under warm, running water.
- Dry using disposable paper towel.

Wash your hands again:

- After visiting the toilet.
- After handling raw food.
- After using a tissue, coughing or sneezing.
- After handling garbage.
- After changing a nappy.
- After handling pets or other animals.
- After smoking or touching your hair or other body parts.

Further Reading: