

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 (eg cutlery, plates). A food handler may be involved in food preparation, production, cooking, service, packing, display or storage.

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 a foodborne disease (such as vomiting, diarrhoea or fever) must:

- report that they are or may be suffering from the disease, or carrying the disease
- not handle food where there is a reasonable likelihood of food contamination as a result of the disease
- 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

Hygiene requirements

Food handlers must:

- take all practicable measures to ensure the body, anything from the body and any clothing does not contaminate food or food surfaces
- take all practicable measures to prevent unnecessary contact with ready-to-eat food
- ensure clothing is clean
- cover bandages and dressings on exposed parts of the body with a waterproof covering
- not eat, sneeze, blow, cough, spit or smoke around food or food surfaces

- wash hands whenever hands are likely to be a source of contamination (before handling food and after using the toilet, smoking, coughing, sneezing, using a handkerchief, eating, drinking or touching hair, scalp or body)
- wash hands before working with ready-to-eat food and after handling raw food

Effective hand washing

Thoroughly clean the hands using soap and warm running water and thoroughly dry hands on a single use towel.

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 before handling food and before working with ready-to-eat food after handling raw food.

Gloves must be removed, discarded and replaced with a new pair 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 through foodborne illness.

A food business must maintain easily accessible handwashing facilities and supplies of warm running water, soap, single-use paper towels and other items to thoroughly clean and dry hands.

A food business must ensure food handlers have skills and knowledge in food safety and food hygiene matters relevant to their work.