

14th April 2020

Advice for businesses or community groups proposing to or already operating a new food business in response to current COVID-19 situation.

As a result of the current coronavirus (COVID-19), an increasing number of food businesses and community groups are planning to start, or expand their range of hot and cold food deliveries.

Current scientific advice is that it is very unlikely that COVID-19 can be spread through food but it is really important you think carefully about your proposed business to make sure you have controls in place so you can do this safely.

We have listed key guidance for you below:

This information has been prepared to help you understand clearly how you can meet the food safety laws that apply to your food business. This will ensure that that the food you supply is safe to eat.

Food poisoning can be very serious, particularly for the young and the elderly. Food poisoning bacteria such as Listeria and some types of E.coli can cause severe illness. In some cases it can result in long-term health problems and even prove fatal. Therefore it is important to operate safely and within the parameters of food law.

Food Registered: You must register as a food business with the council. If you are not registered, go to <https://register.food.gov.uk/new/ashford>. There is no cost.

Fitness to work: The Food Standards Agency's [fitness for work](#) guidance for staff who handle food products provides advice on managing sickness in a food business. Understanding this guidance and applying it on both a personal and business level can help to prevent the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Managing Sickness: If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature in the business or workplace they should be sent home and advised to follow the [stay at home guidance](#). If you or an employee are experiencing symptoms, visit NHS 111 online or call 111 if there is no internet access. In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured, or their life is at risk. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell with symptoms consistent with coronavirus infection.

It is not necessary to close the business or workplace or send any staff home, unless government policy changes. You should keep monitoring the [government response to coronavirus](#) for further updates.

Social Distancing: The Government advice on social distancing measures applies to everyone. You need to minimise opportunities for the virus to spread by maintaining a distance of 2 meters between individuals. This includes staff working in your business.



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Hand washing: Ensure staff are handwashing regularly and basins provided with warm running water, anti-bacterial soap and paper towels.

Hands should be washed regularly:

- ⊗ On arrival at work
- ⊗ Before handling any food
- ⊗ After handling raw food
- ⊗ After touching anything that customers, staff or delivery drivers may have contaminated
- ⊗ After touching hand contact surfaces such as handrails, door handles
- ⊗ Always after using the toilet or going into the toilet areas
- ⊗ After touching your face, sneezing or coughing
- ⊗ In between **ALL** tasks
- ⊗ After cleaning, using the toilet, smoking, handling and opening packaging, money, receipts and cleaning supplies, handling refuse
- ⊗ After removing gloves and aprons and before putting on new ones
- ⊗ Any time your hands are contaminated

Hygiene Rules: Wear clean protective clothing.

- ⊗ If you have a skin, nose or throat problem or an infected wound, do not handle unwrapped food.
- ⊗ If you have a stomach upset, do not handle food for at least 48hrs after you are free of symptoms.
- ⊗ Ensure that cuts, spots or sores are covered with a brightly coloured waterproof plaster.
- ⊗ Do not smoke, eat or drink where open food is handled.
- ⊗ Clean as you go - keep all equipment and surfaces clean and disinfected.
- ⊗ Avoid unnecessary handling of food.

Training: All food handlers must be trained or supervised to an appropriate level, depending on the type of food handled. If your business involves the handling of high-risk foods, such as meat products, dairy products, fish or shellfish, it is strongly advised that you obtain the equivalent of the CIEH Level 2 Award in Food Safety.

Food safety management system: A documented Food Safety Management system (also known as Hazard Analysis or HACCP) is a legal requirement and an essential part of ensuring food safety. You need to consider in detail how you prepare and handle foodstuffs from purchase of ingredients to serving customers, identify what food safety hazards exist at each stage and put appropriate controls/procedures in place to prevent these hazards. For businesses providing, preparing or selling high-risk foods, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has produced a pack entitled 'Safer Food, Better Business' to help you comply. You can download a copy of the pack from the FSA website at:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/sfbb-catering-2019.pdf>

Reputable Suppliers: all food must be sourced from reputable suppliers, this may prove particularly challenging with food supply chains under pressure keeping up with demand. Traceability of all your food products coming in and going out is a legal requirement.

Stock Control: Fresh high risk foods or other perishable products have a 'use by' date on them. Check these daily and make sure that food beyond its use by date is discarded. Follow the manufacturers' guidance on storage and shelf life.

Ambient shelf stable products do not require refrigeration but must be stored in a cool dry hygienic space away from direct sunlight and away from any potential pest damage. These products will have a 'best before' date on them. They can be used after the best before date has expired **provided** they have not been previously opened and there is no evidence of damage to the packaging. There will be no food safety risk but the quality may start to deteriorate.

Safe temperatures: If your business involves preparation, handling or storage of high-risk foods, effective temperature control is one of the most important safeguards for controlling the growth of food poisoning organisms and preventing food poisoning. High risk foods are those that can support the growth of bacteria, including food poisoning bacteria.

High risk foods include: dairy products; foods containing cooked meat/poultry/fish/eggs and cooked vegetable products (including rice); prepared ready-to-eat vegetables and prepared salads containing mayonnaise or coleslaw; most smoked or cured meat; and fish and shellfish.

Chilled foods: high-risk and vacuum packed foods must be kept at or below 8°C, preferably below 5°C, during storage, transport and display for sale. It is also good practice to keep raw meats and raw meat products below 5°C. This can be achieved using refrigerated vehicles and refrigerated display units or suitable insulated containers with sufficient ice packs. Raw fish should be displayed under ice which should be regularly topped up.

Cooking food: meats/poultry and products containing these must be thoroughly cooked to at least 75°C. A food probe thermometer can be used to confirm this - disinfect between uses.

Hot holding: high-risk foods held hot for service after cooking must be kept at a temperature at or above 63°C.

Cooling Foods: Batch cooking and cooling of foods must be done safely. It is important to make sure foods are cooled rapidly to below 8°C within ideally with 90 minutes but no longer than 2 hours. Ice baths, decanting into small portions, cold running water, and blast chilling are a few of the different ways that can be used to achieve this.

Frozen food: the recommended operating temperature for freezers is between -18°C and -21°C.

Temperature monitoring: Regular temperature checks are imperative to ensure that foods are being kept at safe temperatures. You will need a suitable thermometer(s) and food safe probe wipes. You should keep a record of your temperature checks as you will need to provide evidence of correct temperature control.

The law allows for a one-off period of up to a maximum of 4 hours during which high-risk foods can be displayed for sale unrefrigerated. If the food is to be kept for future sale, it must be chilled below 8°C or be thrown away. The food must not be displayed again at a temperature above 8°C.

Hot food can be displayed for sale at a temperature below 63°C for a single period of up to 2 hours.

It is, however, much safer to keep high-risk foods at safe temperatures at all times.

If you do choose to store high risk foods out of proper temperature control you must have a system in place and be able to demonstrate clearly that the permitted display times have not been exceeded.

Cross-contamination: Measures must be put in place to prevent cross-contamination during preparation, storage or service of food:

- ⊖ Food preparation areas should be designated for separate raw and ready to eat food production where possible or production should be separated by time and disinfection.
- ⊖ Colour coded chopping boards should be used according to task and purple boards are now available for allergen use. They must be cleaned/disinfected after use.
- ⊖ Raw and cooked food should be kept separate at all times, raw food should always be stored below cooked food, ideally separate refrigerators should be used.
- ⊖ Clean sinks after washing/preparing vegetables and raw food.
- ⊖ Avoid unnecessary touching/handling of food, use tongs or serving equipment.
- ⊖ All equipment including knives and containers should be cleaned and disinfected after use.
- ⊖ Equipment for handling raw and ready to eat food must be washed and stored separately.
- ⊖ Disinfect all cloths regularly and replace as soon as they become worn/damaged. The use of disposable cloths and paper towels is recommended.
- ⊖ Food must not be stored on the ground and must be kept away from risk of contamination.
- ⊖ Equipment/utensils/crockery should be stored hygienically and kept free from contamination.
- ⊖ Protect food from pests (insects, birds and rodents).
- ⊖ Do not wash raw meat.

Allergens: As the person preparing and providing the food, you have very clear responsibilities to make sure your customers know if any of the 14 identified allergens may be in the food you are supplying. This includes them being in sauces or flavourings you may have added to your recipe.

You must make allergen information easily available to your customers and the best time to do this is at the time of their order, but you are also strongly advised to include information about allergens on each item of food you supply.

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/recipe-sheet.pdf><https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/allergen-chart.pdf>

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/allergen-signage.pdf>

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/loosefoodsleaflet.pdf>

<http://allergytraining.food.gov.uk/>

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/food-allergies.pdf>

Washing facilities – hand and equipment: Effective hand and equipment washing is essential where open foods are handled to prevent food becoming contaminated with bacteria that can cause illness. Where open foods are sold the law requires that:

Suitable and sufficient hand wash facilities must be provided for use by food handlers. A separate designated hand wash basin with hot and cold (or suitably mixed) running water, supplies of antibacterial soap and hygienic hand drying facilities must be available.

Suitable facilities must also be provided for cleaning utensils and equipment and, where relevant, washing of food. An adequate supply of hot and cold (or suitably mixed) running water must be provided as well as supplies of cleaning and disinfection materials.

Cleaning and Disinfection: Supplies of a suitable detergent and food grade disinfectant or sanitising agent should be used for the regular cleaning and disinfection of equipment and work surfaces. If you handle raw and ready-to-eat foods you must use a disinfectant that meets the British Standards BS EN 1276:1997 or BS EN 13697:2001. Hazardous substances, including certain cleaning materials, must be used and stored in a safe manner.

Equipment: All articles, fittings and equipment with which food comes into contact shall be kept clean and be constructed of such materials and be kept in such good order, repair and condition, as to minimise the risk of contamination.

The construction of all articles, fittings and equipment must enable them to be kept thoroughly cleaned and where necessary, disinfected, sufficient for the purpose intended. The installation of all articles, fittings and equipment should allow adequate cleaning of the surrounding area.

Adequate provision must be made for the cleaning and where necessary disinfecting of work utensils and equipment.

Water supply: Water used for food preparation and hand and equipment cleaning must be obtained from a safe drinking water supply.

Transportation: Food deliveries must be wrapped, covered or placed in suitable containers to prevent contamination. Vehicles and containers should be kept clean and in good repair. If the vehicle is used for other purposes, it should be thoroughly cleaned before use. High-risk foods must be kept at a safe temperature.

Structure: All food surfaces must be of sound construction enabling effective cleaning. Choose ceiling, wall and floor finishes that are smooth, hard-wearing and washable. Floors should be non-slip. Surfaces used for preparing or displaying food must be smooth and impervious to allow them to be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. Suitable ventilation and lighting should be provided as appropriate.

Refuse

Provide a bin for food waste and other rubbish. Adequate provision must be made for the removal and storage of food waste and other refuse.

Pest control: Food businesses are required to take all reasonable precautions to prevent food pests, namely rats, mice, cockroaches and flying insects gaining entry into food storage and preparation areas. This is to prevent the contamination of foodstuffs.

Check that you have done the following:

- ⊖ Any gaps and holes to external doors, windows, pipes, drains etc. must be filled or covered with a solid, durable material in order to minimise pest entry points into food preparation and storage areas.
- ⊖ You should regularly check for any evidence of pests and call in a reputable pest control company if any signs are seen.

Removing Pests

You can search for a company on the [British Pest Control Association](#) (BPCA website)