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HAND WASHING PROCEDURES (ONE OF THE FIVE PILLARS OF FOOD SAFETY)

Arguably one of the most important factors in prevention of food poisoning, is the correct hand washing techniques.

Because food handlers deal with raw meat and vegetables, they are constantly exposed to germs such as *E.coli*, thus leading to the need for regular and correct hand washing.

Because of the high risk nature of dealing with the above products, our walkthrough visual assessment places a high emphasis on the provision of the appropriate amenities, sufficient supply of facilities as well as the correct procedures. In total, hand washing as well as staff personal hygiene accounts for 10% of the total scores for the Hygiene Survey Report and 11% for the Facilities Report.

FCS's best practise, recommends at least one dedicated hand wash basin per 15 staff, and/or one basin per separated production area. The use of a liquid anti-bacterial hand soap, disposable paper towel, a dedicated pedal bin and an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

When should one wash their hands?

1. Before and after eating.
2. After using the toilet facilities.
3. Entering and leaving the food production area.
4. Between tasks (such as between food preparation and cleaning).
5. After handling raw products, such as raw meats and vegetables.
6. Handling any item that may encourage cross-contamination.



Escherichia coli

E. coli is a typically harmless microorganism that is found naturally in healthy human and animal intestines. It plays a vital role in digestion, helps with the absorption of vitamins from foods and prevents the growth of various dangerous bacterial species. In essence, most varieties of *E. coli* are harmless. However, there are some that are not so helpful.

We test for *E.coli* on hands and prepared foods, because it is an indicator organism, that tells us that there has been exposure to unhygienic practices and that if *E.coli* is present, there are potentially other more harmful bacteria present as well.

We test for E.coli on hands and prepared foods, because it is an indicator organism, that tells us that there has been exposure to unhygienic practices and that if E.coli is present, there are potentially other more harmful bacteria present as well.

One harmful strain is *E. coli* O157:H7. It produces a powerful toxin that damages the lining of the small intestine which can cause severe abdominal cramps, bloody diarrhoea, vomiting and sometimes fever. In rare cases, this bacterium can cause long-term illness or even death. Unlike most disease causing bacteria, even if only a small amount of *E. coli* enters your system you can become ill.

You can become exposed to *E. coli* by consuming contaminated water or food, such as undercooked meat and raw vegetables. Healthy adults usually recover from infection with *E. coli* O157:H7 within a week, but young children and older adults have a greater risk of developing a life-threatening form of illness and kidney failure.

Signs and symptoms of *E. coli* O157:H7 infection typically begins three or four days after exposure to the bacteria, although illness may set in as soon as one day after to over a week following exposure.

There are no current medicines or vaccines for *E. coli* infection, but a number of treatments, such as rest and intake of fluids to prevent dehydration can help relieve the symptoms. In severe cases, hospitalization may be required. In the case of *E. coli* O157:H7, prevention is better than cure.



So what can you do to prevent the growth of and contamination with E. coli?

1. Wash and sanitise your hands regularly for at least 30 seconds.
2. Wash raw produce thoroughly.
3. Wash and sanitise all utensils, high risk equipment and processing tables correctly following each use.
4. Avoid cross-contamination of foods during preparation and storage, including in the fridges and freezers.
5. Make sure food is kept at appropriate temperature.
6. Avoid eating raw meat and poultry.



Dealing with Raw Fruits & Vegetables

As the above articles highlight; raw vegetables carry a high-risk in a food production kitchen, and thus should be treated in a manner that recognises these risks.

The best method in addressing the prevention of concerns, is to start from the process of delivery.

Upon delivery, one should ensure that all raw fruits and vegetables are of the quality that is required, removed from their packaging (this is often in the form of cardboard boxes). The next step then is to wash and sanitise these products to ensure longevity and prevention of contamination from outside sources.

How to Sanitise Fruits & Vegetables:

Fruits & Vegetables should be soaked (much like the cutting boards) for a minimum of 3 to 5 minutes in a food safe sanitiser (speak to your chemical supplier), rinsed in clean water and placed in a clean, sanitised container within a refrigeration unit that is no warmer than 7.0°C.

Food group segregation should apply as required, and remember that any prepared product (ie. Sliced vegetables and fruits) should be covered and date coded.

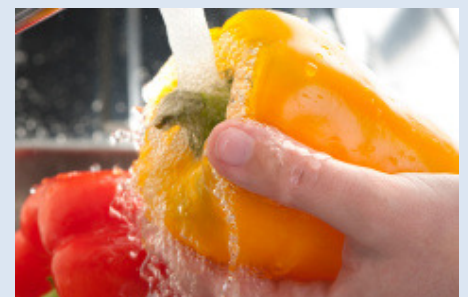
Food Group Segregation

Raw foods and Ready-to-eat foods must be well separated:

It is most ideal to have separate refrigeration facilities for different raw products, ie. A vegetable cold room, raw meats cold room, seafood cold room. Furthermore, a separate production and diary cold room is also recommended.

Due to the realities of costs and available space in kitchens, the below is recommended as a minimum:

1. All Ready-to-eat foods on the upper-most shelves.
2. Followed by raw fruits and vegetables.
3. Lastly all raw meats.
4. Shellfish should be separated from all seafood and other products.





FOOD SAFETY CHECKLISTS

Daily, weekly and monthly checklists are critically important in the food production environment as this is the first line in being able to prove due diligence in the food safety management program.

If filled in correctly and kept up-to-date, these checklists are able to prove that the kitchen was not negligent in causing a potential case of food poisoning. Not only this, but these checks are also an effective management tool for monitoring the duties of the kitchen. To this end, the checklist must not only be filled in when required, but must also reflect the conditions of the kitchen. By way of example, if certain areas of the kitchen are found to be dirty, the cleaning checklist must show that the area was dirty, and that a corrective action was implemented that rectified the concern, ie. That the area was cleaned.

FCS auditors cannot in good conscience award marks for a cleaning checklist that shows the kitchen as spotless, but was shown not to be the case in the walkthrough visual survey.

A relatively new document which has been incorporated into the FCS Hygiene Report, is the **thermometer verification record**. This document has been introduced, in order to assist the kitchen with ensuring that the handheld digital probe thermometer is able to accurately record temperatures within both the hot and cold temperature ranges, so that the temperature records are shown to be as accurate as possible.

The checklist is only required to be filled in on a monthly basis, and should include the readings of ice-water as well as boiling water. Guidelines are given on the document of what these temperatures should be, yet these do vary according to the geographical position ie. Coastal regions should expect boiling temperatures closer to 98°C and areas higher in elevation will be closer to 91°C.

How to verify your thermometer:

1. Place a scoop of ice into a glass with a small amount of cold water to facilitate melting.
2. Insert your thermometer within the ice water, and allow the temperature to stabilise.
3. Record the reading.
4. Place a small pot on the stove or gas burner, add water and bring to the boil.
5. Insert your thermometer within the boiling water, and allow the temperature to stabilise.
6. Record the reading.

Required Checklists:

1. First aid box inventory list
2. Oil monitoring checklist
3. Staff hygiene checklist
4. Thermometer verification records
5. Refrigeration records
6. Hot & Cold food temperature records
7. Food delivery checklist
8. A master cleaning schedule
9. Detailed cleaning procedures
10. Cleaning checklist

*These checklists can be obtained from our Website:
foodconsulting.co.za/documents*