



Brighton & Hove
City Council

Food Safety Information

E coli O157

E coli can kill...

The tragic case of 5-year old Mason Jones, who died following the Welsh outbreak of E coli O157 in September 2005, shows how devastating an infection can be. Over 150 people were infected, most of them children, with 31 being hospitalised.

With only a handful of bacteria...

It usually takes millions of food poisoning bacteria to cause harm. It takes only a few E coli O157 bacteria to cause a potentially fatal infection.

In a wide range of raw foods...

E coli O157 has been found in raw meat, unpasteurised milk, vegetables, sprouted seeds and salad vegetables.

But it can be controlled and prevented by basic hygiene rules.

- keeping raw and ready to eat foods separate from delivery and storage, through preparation and cooking, to service
- proper cleaning and disinfection of all surfaces, equipment and utensils that could spread bacteria
- thorough personal hygiene at all times

As E coli bacteria are invisible food handlers must assume they could be present and handle food accordingly. Most of this involves following simple, basic rules that have been taught on food hygiene courses for years. The guidance produced by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) builds on these basics to provide more comprehensive standards.

This newsletter aims to show you how these basic rules of hygiene can be applied in any food business where raw and ready to eat foods are handled.

Controlling the risk of cross contamination

There are three main ways to control the risk of cross contamination:

1. Separation

This is the most effective control measure. Where possible separate work areas, storage areas, fridges and freezers, equipment, utensils, cloths, over-clothing and the staff that handle raw and ready to eat foods.

You can also separate by time - preparing raw meat and vegetables before routine food handling and cooking takes place. Good businesses even make sure deliveries come when there is no high risk food being handled.

Complex machinery for slicing, mincing or vacuum packing can be difficult to thoroughly clean and disinfect, which is why the FSA guidance recommends having separate machines for raw and for ready to eat foods.

2. Effective cleaning and disinfection

This is always a two stage process.

1. **Cleaning** should remove visible dirt, grease, food particles and debris, so that disinfectants can reach every part of a surface. After cleaning, surfaces need to be rinsed and dried using paper towels to remove any residues
2. **Disinfection** destroys harmful bacteria. Disinfectant needs to be applied at the correct dilution for the correct amount of time to destroy bacteria. This contact time can vary between products, so you must read and follow the manufacturer's instructions. If these are not clear, perhaps you should buy a different product or contact the manufacturer.

3. Handle food hygienically

This covers proper hand washing and drying. While you can fit non-hand operated taps, it may be easier and cheaper to ensure staff use a paper towel to turn off taps after hand washing. You will need to place paper towel dispensers by the wash basin, and ensure staff are trained and monitored.

Many businesses will also minimise the handling of food by

- buying already washed and prepared vegetables to avoid contamination by soil
- buying already prepared raw meat
- using tongs and other utensils to handle food, especially in small catering environments such as a mobile catering vehicle. Colour coded tongs etc for raw and ready to eat will improve controls
- disposable gloves can be used to handle raw foods, provided they are disposed of once the task is completed and hands washed before handling ready to eat foods. Again, separate packs or colour coding can help control cross contamination

Updating your procedures

Many of these principles, and those contained within the FSA guidance, are part of generic food safety management systems like Safer Food Better Business (SFBB).

However, as the best businesses often find, SFBB needs more to ensure it meets the FSA guidance on cross contamination. Perhaps the most important area to update is the cleaning schedule which should

- identify the area or equipment to be cleaned
- when it must be cleaned
- whether cleaning and disinfection is needed
- the method, chemicals and equipment to be used
- the dilution rates and contact times of the disinfectant
- any safety precautions to be followed
- who carries out the cleaning and disinfection
- the preparation of the equipment or area, such as cleaning down before disinfection, stripping down machinery
- the standard expected, including any monitoring criteria
- the reassembly methods or other conditions before an area or equipment can be used again
- who supervises the job

Other areas you may need to update include:

- how you separate raw and ready to eat foods into different areas, where possible. If not, how you separate to control the risk of contamination, e.g. time, different fridges
- use of commercial dishwashers recommended to destroy bacteria. If not used, document how are you separating the cleaning of equipment etc. that have been in contact with raw foods from all other equipment
- evidence from manufacturers or suppliers that your disinfectants meet the standards in **BS EN1276:1997** or **BS EN 13697:2001**
- where and when single use cloths should be used for cleaning
- installing non hand operated taps, or using paper cloths to turn taps off after washing hands. (A simple notice can be printed and posted close to wash basins to remind staff)
- cleaning of complex equipment like mincing or slicing machines, or vacuum packing machines.

The fact sheet from the FSA provides more specific detail to help you.

Management

The best businesses have effective systems and procedures that help prevent the contamination or cross-contamination of food with E. coli O157. These are written, and often go beyond the details provided by systems like Safer Food Better Business. These businesses ensure their staff understand what they have to do, and why.

Good businesses

- provide clear guidance and instructions to staff
- train their staff appropriately to understand and carry out the correct practices. This training is regularly refreshed
- Monitor their staff to ensure everything is working as it should
- Record the training and instruction given so they have accurate records to know what was done and when refresher training is needed. These records also demonstrate good and best practice to inspectors
- Review their systems and management on a regular basis to ensure they stay up to date and effective

Finally

Food businesses should adopt and follow the FSA guidance to control the risks and help prevent another outbreak of E coli O157 where someone dies.

The FSA also expects food inspectors to enforce the standards in the guidance and take a firmer line to control the risk of E coli O157.

Recording the changes and improvements to your management systems will help you demonstrate good food safety practices to inspectors. In turn, this is more likely to improve confidence and your chances of gaining a higher score under the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme.

If you fail to comply, or demonstrate compliance, with the guidance during an inspection, you will find it harder to achieve a top rating of 5. This will still be the case even if you achieved 5 on a previous inspection.

For more detail and information you can download further copies of the guidance, fact sheet and Question and Answer documents at

<http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/guidancenotes/hygguid/ecoliguide>

Alternatively, please visit www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/foodsafety for a range of business help and support. You can also contact the Food Safety Team at Brighton and Hove City Council on (01273) 292161