

Food Safety and Hygiene Guidance and Policy

It is a common misconception that churches are automatically exempt from health and safety and food safety and hygiene laws and regulations as they are not a business but a voluntary and/or charitable organisation. This is simply **NOT** the case as all organisations are required to comply.

Many Places of Worship handle food, whether that is on a daily basis preparing meals, weekly coffee mornings, or an annual fund-raising event. **The same basic food safety rules apply.** These rules are subject to constant review, and what was once the case may no longer be so owing to changes in the medical and scientific understanding of dangers and best practice.

Detailed below are general guidance notes provided by **ChurchSafety** which have been adopted as one of the background resources when creating our current Food and Safety Policy.

Room and Layout

Any room where food is handled should be large enough to ensure that food can be handled safely. In all situations, there must be adequate ventilation in the room, for instance by an openable window (fitted with a fly screen if needed) or by an extractor fan.

The design and layout of the room should help to prevent cross-contamination of ready-to-eat products by bacteria from raw foods. Consideration should be given to the flow of food items around the kitchen, including raw/uncooked, refrigerated, frozen and cooked food. Also consider where waste containers are located, and where washing up takes place, as these can also lead to inadvertent contamination of food.

In addition to a separate wash hand basin, kitchens should be fitted with a minimum of a double-bowl sink or a combination of a single-bowl sink and a dish washer. Where regular vegetable preparation is carried out, an additional sink might be required to separate this from cleaning activities. A single sink would usually be acceptable for smaller kitchens used for preparing light refreshments only.

All kitchens need to be fitted with a hand washing sink which is supplied with hot and cold running water, soap and clean towels (paper hand towels are often recommended over cloth towels or hot-air dryers). Wash hand basins must be located close to the entrance to ensure people can wash their hands before walking too far into the food preparation space.

The ceiling, walls, floor and all work surfaces must be in a good state of repair and made so that they can be effectively cleaned. For example:

Ceilings should be smooth and impervious - textured surfaces and ceiling tiles are not normally recommended. Walls should be smooth, impervious and of a light colour. In many cases, smooth painted plaster would be acceptable, but tiles can be easier to clean. A tiled splash-back should be considered behind sinks, cookers and preparation surfaces to enable easy cleaning. Floors should be easy to clean with slip resistant vinyl sheet / tiles or ceramic tiles. Carpeted surfaces, including mats, are unsuitable as they cannot be easily cleaned and may get contaminated. Work surfaces need to be suitably hard wearing and easily cleaned, and many commercially available worktops would suffice (for light-use only, a domestic kitchen surface might be adequate). Wood that has not been treated is too absorbent to use, and all surfaces need to be suitably sealed around the edges and joints to prevent food accumulation, which can lead to bacterial or mould growth.

Food Safety and Hygiene Guidance and Policy

Food Hazard Analysis

Hazard analysis is similar to Risk Assessment used in other areas of Health and Safety. It is a way of identifying activities and steps that are important to food safety (known as 'critical control points'). From this assessment, you can ensure that you have adequate controls in place to prevent contamination.

The analysis involves a look through each step of the process from buying foodstuffs through storage, cooking, serving and storing prepared foods along with any other steps in-between. Hazards may come from bacteria, chemicals or physical problems like broken glass in food.

Controls can then be put into place to reduce the risk, and many are described on this page. These include cleaning, temperature controls and storing food appropriately. You also need to monitor what you are doing, and this might be by visual checks, taking temperature measurements and using cleaning schedules, but this list is not exhaustive.

For example, consider an analysis of a cooking stage (which is a Critical Control Point):

1. Critical Control Point: Cooking
2. Hazard: Survival of bacteria
3. Control: Ensure adequate cooking
4. Monitoring: Check cooking times and check food temperature

For more information, please refer to the Food Standards Agency.

Protective clothing

People who are handling foods must wear suitable protective clothing, like aprons. These should only be worn in the food preparation area, and must be removed before the person leaves the room. Unlike personal protective equipment, this clothing is to prevent the food becoming contaminated, although it does often double-up to prevent food getting into contact with clothing.

Jewellery can present a contamination risk and should be removed by food handlers. In addition, it is good practice for food handlers with long hair to securely tie hair back. Similarly, any cuts on the skin should be protected using a brightly coloured plaster (blue is normally used for kitchen use).

Temperature control

Temperature control is important to prevent food poisoning, either by killing off bacteria (e.g. through cooking) or reducing the multiplication of bacteria (e.g. through refrigeration).

Refrigerators must be set so that high-risk foods are kept below 8 degrees Celsius. Freezers should be below -18 degrees Celsius. These should be regularly checked to make sure that they are reaching the required temperature and that there is no build up of ice in freezers or freezer compartments.

Food Safety and Hygiene Guidance and Policy

A food probe thermometer is a useful tool to make sure that food has been thoroughly cooked or has been stored correctly. These are readily and cheaply available from many suppliers of catering equipment and safety equipment supplies. As a guide, foods requiring thorough cooking to the centre, such as sausages and cottage pie, should reach 70 degrees Celsius for two minutes, 75 degrees Celsius for 30 seconds or 80 degrees Celsius for six seconds. Probes must be disinfected after use and records kept.

Many bought products designed for reheating come with instructions for heating and serving. If these instructions are followed, the above temperature checks may be skipped. Similarly, if it is obvious that something is hot (such as a simmering gravy), again the temperature checks can be waived. 'Safe' foods such as vegetables are often not subject to temperature checks.

Record keeping

It is essential to keep certain records so that you can refer back to them. This might be, for example, a record of what food items were bought from a wholesalers and supermarket (which might be as simple as keeping an invoice or receipt). Many parts of the food handling process could have a check list or date / time record, but this is not likely to be necessary for the simplest of food handling operations.

A record of temperature checks needs to be kept. For a refrigerator or freezer, take a note of the date and temperature. For foods, also note down what kind of food was probed. Should any temperature not be within limits, list whatever corrective action was taken, such as adjusting a freezer temperature.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Cleaning is the process where visible dirt, grease and food debris are removed. Detergents such as washing-up liquid are useful for cleaning but do not often have antibacterial properties. Nevertheless, bacteria are often destroyed by the action of the cloth or sponge on the item being cleaned.

Disinfection is the process where bacteria are reduced to safe limits. Combined cleaners and disinfectants are called Sanitisers.

In a kitchen, food-safe cleaning chemicals should be used otherwise they can contaminate or taint foods. As an example, bleach and products containing bleach should not be used in a kitchen (except possibly to disinfect floors) because they are not 'food safe' and can taint food that is close by.

When using cleaning chemicals, always follow the instructions on the container. Some chemicals might require additional precautions, see our Chemical Safety page for more information on chemical safety regulations.

To assist with cleaning, food equipment and utensils should be made of smooth, non-absorbent materials that are free from spaces where food could be trapped. Cleaning should be done regularly and all items must be cleaned as soon as possible after they have been used. It is quite common for kitchens in Churches and Places of Worship to be equipped with donated utensils, and these should also be checked for suitability.

Food Safety and Hygiene Guidance and Policy

Rubbish must be removed from the kitchen regularly. Only small containers must be used in a kitchen as this will limit the amount of waste that accumulates in the kitchen. Bins need to have a close-fitting lid and it must be possible to easily clean them.

Food hygiene training

All food handlers should be trained to a level that is appropriate to the work that they do (**this includes volunteers in Churches and Places of Worship for events like Coffee Mornings**). This does not have to be a formal training course, but it is often recommended.

A basic food hygiene course (Level 1 or 2) is usually recommended and is readily available throughout the country. Your local Environmental Health Department (part of your District or Borough Council) should be able to help you find one that is accredited, and there are a number of suppliers retailing computer-based packages.

Registration

In many cases, you will need to register with your local Borough or District Council's Environmental Health department. It is a requirement to register when food is being handled for five or more days in any five consecutive weeks. This is free and must be done 28 days before you use the kitchen. Weekly coffee mornings would therefore come within the scope of these registration requirements.

Note that there is an exemption from registration where food is being prepared occasionally by individuals or groups for gatherings or for sale at charitable events. This includes coffee mornings and charity sales, providing that the event is not regular.

When you have registered, you can expect to be visited by someone from the department who will look around your premises and give you some useful advice on food safety issues. They will also classify the kitchen depending on the risk, which is used by them to work out how often they need to visit. Additionally, a sticker might be provided to show a food hygiene score (often out of five).

*** Saint Michaels is a registered organisation currently holding a 5 star hygiene safety rating ***

Labelling and Pricing

Foods might need to be labelled, especially if it is to be sold as a charity event or similar. Items like one-off cakes, loose buns and jars of jam are usually exempt from this requirement, however, if you regularly sell these, you might need to label the foods.

Any label that appears on the item must be accurate and must display details including the name of the food, a list of ingredients, a Best Before or Use By date, details of any special storage requirements and a metric weight indication. In addition to this, it is usually required to display a price list of the items that you have on sale in some prominent position, or each product must carry its own price tag.

Food for sale needs to be properly packaged. Concerns have been raised recently over the legality of reused jam-jars. In these days of austerity, and with the drive to be 'green', it makes sense to reuse jars and other containers, however, EU legislation presently prohibits this unless the container is designed for reuse. It is also important to make sure that information is available for those who ask about allergens. Some people who suffer with allergies to certain products or food ingredients may ask for this information.

Food Safety and Hygiene Guidance and Policy

Additional information

For more information on food safety and hygiene, and to register with the council, contact your local Borough or District Council's Environmental Health Department.

For more information on food labelling, contact your local Borough or District Council's Trading Standards department.

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