

FOOD & NUTRITION in Care Homes for Older People

Section 5

Food hygiene and Safety

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This section provides an overview of the food hygiene and safety practices that are covered by regulations and refers you to the appropriate guidance, for more detailed information on managing food hygiene and safety.

Contents

The importance of food hygiene and safety	3
Food safety management and food hygiene practice for the care home setting	3
Gift food and food brought in from home	5
Food Hygiene training for care staff	5
Allergens	5
Involving residents in food preparation as a daily activity	6
Trips and outings	6
FAQ's	7

Importance of food hygiene and safety

Older people in your care are a vulnerable group and are more susceptible to food poisoning than the general population. Food poisoning can be a very serious illness and infectious diseases are more prone to spread in care settings.

It is therefore essential to store, handle, prepare and present food in a safe, hygienic environment to help prevent harmful bacteria spreading and growing and to avoid food poisoning.

Food poisoning occurs when the food consumed contains harmful bacteria, viruses or other microbes, collectively known as germs.

Germs are very hard to detect since they do not usually affect the taste, appearance or smell of food. They can multiply very quickly and to do so need moisture, food, warmth and time. Most food poisoning is preventable.

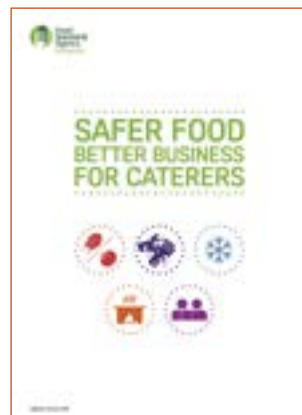
There is a legal requirement for all settings that prepare and/or serve any food and drink to be registered as a food business with the Environmental Health Department in the local authority.

Food safety management and food hygiene practice for the care home setting

Care homes must have a written Food Safety Management System (FSMS). The FSMS must explain how safe food is produced by identifying food safety hazards and the controls needed to minimise the hazards.

Small residential care homes may wish to use a FSMS called Safer Food, Better Business (SFBB) along with a Residential Care Homes Supplement. These have been produced by the Food Standards Agency to help small businesses with food safety management procedures and food hygiene regulations. To access these go to:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/sfbb>



To access Safer Food Better Business toolkits go to:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/caterers/sfbb/sfbbcaterers>

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/safer-food-better-business-supplement-for-residential-care-homes>

The SFBB pack and supplement are not suitable for larger residential care homes or for nursing homes, as a more detailed and comprehensive food safety management system is required. These types of businesses require other food safety procedures that are not covered by SFBB, for example a full infection control policy.

The information in the Safer Food Better Business packs is based on the 4 C's of food hygiene and safety management:

- Cross contamination.
- Cleaning.
- Chilling.
- Cooking.

Cross Contamination

This is one of the most common causes of food poisoning. It happens when harmful bacteria are spread onto food from other food, worktops, hands or utensils. Good cleaning and handling practices help stop bacteria from spreading and can also help manage the risk of cross contamination from allergens. Good personal hygiene is essential for staff handling and serving food, and assisting residents to eat.

The E Coli O157 guidance on cross contamination must be followed by catering staff:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/e-coli-cross-contamination-guidance>



It is also important that residents undertake basic hygiene practices themselves, if able or are supported to, e.g. washing their hands with soap and water before eating meals or snacks, and after going to the toilet or handling animals, and not eating food that has fallen on the floor.

Chilling

Chilling food can help reduce the risk of food poisoning. At temperatures below 5 °C, most bacteria remain dormant but can start to multiply again if warm conditions return. Listeriosis is particularly serious for older people as there is a high fatality rate. The following guidance provides advice about how to minimise the risk:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/listeria-guidance-june2016-rev.pdf>



Cleaning

Effective cleaning and disinfection, and disposal of waste is essential to get rid of harmful bacteria and allergens, to stop them spreading to food.

Cooking

It is essential to cook food properly to kill any harmful bacteria. If it is not cooked or reheated properly it might not be safe to eat. Bacteria multiply best between 5 and 63 °C but are destroyed at temperatures of 75 °C.

Gift food and food brought in from home

You have a responsibility to ensure gift food and food brought in from home is stored safely.

Relatives and friends may bring in gifts of food or food from home for residents. Residential care homes can refer to the SFBB residential care homes supplement for information about this. Nursing homes need to consider gifts of food and food brought in from home in their food safety management system.

It is recommended that information regarding gift food and food brought in from home is given to residents and visitors, so they are clear about what is acceptable.



Food Hygiene training for care staff

All food handlers must be suitably trained, according to their role. Generally, it is expected that those handling open, high risk foods or those in a supervisory role, will complete a recognised Food Hygiene course, such as a Level 2 Food Hygiene Certificate or equivalent, within 3 months of starting work. In the meantime, food handlers will need supervision by suitably trained staff.

It is advised that kitchen managers, chefs and cooks undertake Level 3 Food Hygiene training. It is recommended that training is updated at least once every 3 years.

The level of training will depend on the role staff have in food handling and preparation. For further detailed information about food hygiene training requirements, please refer to the Catering Guide which can be found at the link below:

<https://www.bha.org.uk/book/#/reader/chapter/3>

Allergens

It is a legal requirement for food businesses to provide information about the 14 allergens used in the food and drink they serve. You need to be able to supply information for each item on your menu that contains, as an ingredient, any of the 14 allergens.

It is a legal requirement to keep a record of what food products you have bought, who you bought them from, the quantity, and the date and allergen information. Usually the easiest way to do this is to keep all your invoices and receipts.

Safer Food Better Business for Caterers has information and guidance on managing allergens in food and safe food preparation and practice to avoid cross contamination. Refer also to Section 2 of this guidance on menu planning – providing food allergen information.

There are some helpful tools and templates to help you record allergenic ingredients in your dishes. You can find this and other tools at:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-food-businesses>

It is advisable that kitchen staff and food handlers have training on food allergens to ensure the safety of residents with allergies.

It is important to know what to do if you care for a resident who has a food allergy, because allergies can be life-threatening.

See also:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-institutional-caterers>

Involving residents in food preparation as a daily activity

Growing food, washing and eating it

Residents will benefit from being involved in growing their own vegetables, even if this is a small raised bed or window box. However, care must be taken to avoid any infection which can spread easily through cross contamination.

Best practice needs to follow E coli O157 guidance:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/e-coli-cross-contamination-guidance>

Cooking with residents

Cooking with residents is an enjoyable activity and an effective way of helping many residents, particularly those with dementia, to talk about food memories. They may also contribute their own recipes and ideas for menus and help try out and test new recipes.

Training for supporting residents to cook and prepare food

It is best practice for you and your staff to undertake as a minimum, a Level 2 Food Hygiene Certificate.

Key points to remember when supporting residents:

- Plan carefully and make sure you have everything you need before you start.
- Show the residents how to do it, be patient and enjoy watching their skills and confidence improve every time you cook.
- It is good practice to cook a range of different foods and use healthy foods that follow the food and nutrition standards and guidance.
- Recipes which evoke memories of the past can work well with residents.
- Make sure residents are appropriately supervised and good hygiene practices are followed e.g. thorough hand washing.

Trips and outings

Insulated cool boxes, or a cool box with ice packs, should be used for carrying food when taking residents on trips or outings. Remember to follow the food best practice guidance for suitable food choices and food safety.



FAQ's

Q: We are a large care setting and meal service can take a while and we are nervous about serving rice to our residents because it is a high risk food. How long is it acceptable to leave between rice being cooked and served?

A: It is acceptable to serve rice to residents as it is a good source of starchy carbohydrate to provide variety at mealtimes. However, care must be taken because if cooked rice is left at room temperature, spores can multiply and produce toxins which cause food poisoning. Reheating will not get rid of these. Holding time should be as short as possible and will depend on your type of food service, facilities and numbers. It is recommended that rice is served within an hour of being cooked.

Q: We have 2 residents with a dairy allergy and want to bulk cook some items and freeze in small portions. Is it ok to freeze home made rice pudding made with soya milk?

A: Yes, it is acceptable to freeze rice pudding. It must be cooled as quickly as possible (a maximum of 90 minutes at room temperature, less if possible), then placed in the freezer. It can be difficult to cool large amounts of food quickly. The food may need to be portioned or spread out on shallow trays. Remember to label with the date of freezing and keep for no longer than 3 months as the quality of the product when thawed and reheated may deteriorate. Defrost the rice pudding in the fridge and reheat to the correct temperature. Check the instructions on the soya milk to ensure it is suitable for freezing.

Q: Has the advice changed on giving soft boiled eggs ?

A: Yes, the Food Standards Agency revised the guidance in 2017. Consumers who may be more vulnerable to infection, which include older people, can eat raw or soft boiled hen eggs or foods containing lightly cooked hen eggs provided that they are produced under the British Lion Code of Practice.

This ensures that all hens are vaccinated against Salmonella and all hens, eggs and feed are fully traceable. The eggs should be stored in the fridge and used within the durability date.

Q: Are older people care settings ok to serve eggs laid by their own chickens?

A: No – they will not carry the Lion brand or equivalent, which gives assurance that flocks have been vaccinated against Salmonella.

Q: Does the guidance on the use of sprays that comply with the E coli O157 guidance differ for different types of care home settings?

A: No, all residential care homes and nursing homes have to conform to using a spray that complies with BS EN 1276 or BS EN 13697.

Q: Who do I ask for advice on food hygiene and safety?

A: You can approach your local authority environmental health department for advice. The Food Standards Agency website also has useful information.

<https://www.food.gov.uk/>

Q: Do I need to wash all fruit and vegetables even if bought in a sealed packet?

A: Yes, it is important to wash or peel all fruit and vegetables before eating, unless they are labelled as ready to eat

Q: We have a number of residents with different cultural requirements and their relatives like to bring extra meals in or their favourite foods, to tempt them. Is there anything that we should tell them not to bring in?

A: Please refer to the detailed guidance in the Safer Food Better Business - Residential Care Homes supplement.