

Ready-to-eat Food

General Hygiene Advice for Food Businesses



Introduction and scope

Ready-to-eat foods are foods that have been prepared so that they can be eaten without further cooking. Sandwiches, salad greens and pre-cooked meat (such as siu mei and lo mei) as well as food cooked ahead of time to serve cold might be intrinsically high-risk since there is no or insufficient heat treatment to eradicate bacteria that can pose dangers to human health.

If hygiene practices are not observed, ready-to-eat foods may help to spread “superbugs” apart from posing the risk of foodborne pathogens. “Superbugs” are microbes that have produced antimicrobial resistance (AMR) which can prevent a wide range of antimicrobial agents, such as antibiotics, from functioning against them. As a result, they make infections more difficult to treat.



This guide provides general hygiene advice for handling ready-to-eat foods and can be used in conjunction with, but not limited to, the following trade guidelines:

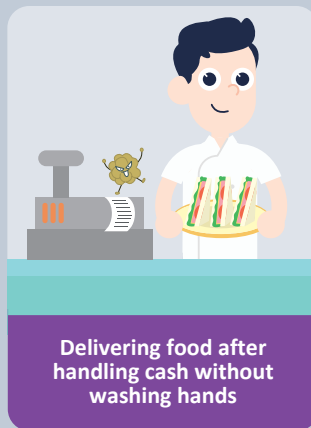
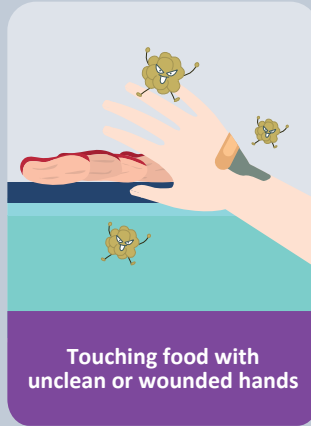
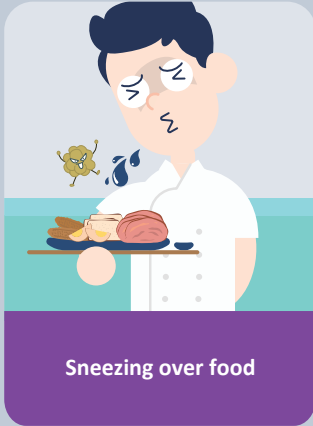
- Sandwiches
- Siu mei
- Lo mei
- Pre-cut fruits and fruit products
- Poached chicken
- Salads
- Sushi and sashimi
- Oysters intended for raw consumption

Please scan the QR code to access the specific guideline:



How ready-to-eat foods get contaminated?

While thorough cooking or reheating before consumption is the most effective way to kill pathogens and “superbugs” that may be present in food, some ready-to-eat foods may be served raw and/or involve handling after cooking. Cross-contamination of food, followed by the spreading of pathogens and “superbugs”, can happen if food handlers fail to maintain good hygiene during food preparation:



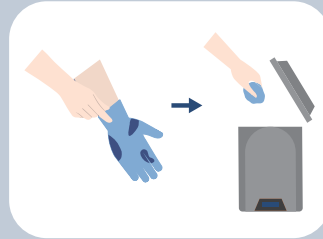
The above examples illustrate that it is very important to **have good personal and environmental hygiene, especially with your hands** and **surroundings** to keep ready-to-eat foods safe for consumption.

Hygiene advice for handling ready-to-eat foods

When preparing ready-to-eat foods, the following good personal, environmental and food hygiene should be practised:

Personal Hygiene 1

- Make sure staff wash their hands thoroughly with water and liquid soap between tasks, especially when working with raw and ready-to-eat foods simultaneously. Rub hands with soap for at least 20 seconds.
- Wash hands before wearing disposable gloves, between glove changes and after removing gloves. Discard gloves when damaged, soiled, switching tasks or during staff breaks.



- Avoid using mobile devices (such as mobile phones) or touching other potentially contaminated objects (such as cleaning cloths or cash) when handling food. After touching these objects, wash hands thoroughly before handling food again.
- Wear a face mask and hair net as appropriate, and wear clean work attire.
- Food handlers should refrain from handling food if they have any symptoms of illness such as diarrhoea and vomiting.



How to Wash Your Hands

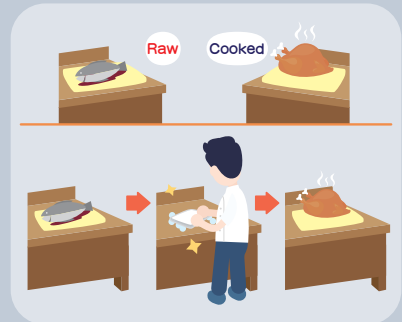
For more information on maintaining hand hygiene as well as the proper use of gloves, please refer to the Centre for Food Safety's (CFS) *Hand Washing Guideline for Food Handlers*. It is advised to display the hand-washing poster near wash basins.



Environmental Hygiene

2

- Clean and sanitise all areas used for ready-to-eat food preparation, storage and display on a regular basis.
- Make sure work surfaces, chopping boards, knives, etc. are clean before food preparation. Clean and sanitise them after preparing raw food.
- If preparing both raw and ready-to-eat food simultaneously, make sure this is done in separate areas which are clean and disinfected. If not, the surface and utensils used must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between tasks.



Cleaning vs Sanitisation

- For cleaning purpose, washing with warm to hot water and detergent foam helps to remove food debris and dissolve grease and dirt.
- Sanitisation aims to reduce the number of bacteria and other organisms to a safe level on an already cleaned surface; this can be done with hot water or chemical sanitisers or a combination of both. Wear clean gloves to prevent burns.
- When using a sanitiser, follow the instructions on the label.
- For sanitisation with a dishwasher, follow the manufacturer's instructions and maintain it regularly. Do not overload the dishwasher.

Food Hygiene 3

When preparing and handling food, food handlers should:

- Keep ready-to-eat foods completely separate from raw meat, poultry, fish, eggs and unwashed vegetables.
- Use separate chopping boards and utensils for ready-to-eat food.
- Keep ready-to-eat foods covered at all times during preparation and storage. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to store and prepare the food.
- If not immediately served, keep cold foods at 4°C or below, and hot foods above 60°C.



For preparing fruit, vegetables and salad ingredients:

- Peel, trim, or remove the outer parts if necessary
- Wash them thoroughly under clean running water
- Wash the cleanest one first
- When cleaning fruits and vegetables with hard rinds (such as melons) under clean running water, use a clean brush to remove dirt and contaminants from the surface and crevices of the fruits and vegetables.



Wash hands before and after handling fruits and vegetables. After preparing vegetables that have visible dirt or soil, clean and then disinfect chopping boards and work surfaces before preparing other food.

Do not use ready-to-eat foods after the 'use by' date, if any.



After purchasing food, the principle of first-in, first-out should be followed. Once the packaging of the food is opened, the date mark may become irrelevant. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for storage time and conditions after opening, e.g. "refrigerate after opening at or below 4°C and finish within 7 days". Food businesses should have a method of keeping track of when food should be used or thrown away.



If preparing ready-to-eat meats such as siu mei or lo mei:

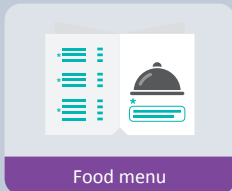
- Avoid preparing food too far in advance or in excess.
- Make sure the meat products are thoroughly cooked or reheated (i.e. core food temperature reaches 75°C or above).

When handling (such as slicing) cooked meat:

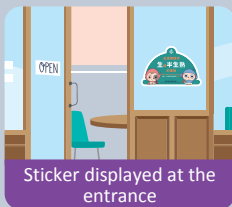
- Avoid direct hand contact with the meat as much as possible – it is a good idea to use clean tongs or slice meat straight on a plate.
- If disposable gloves are used, they should be used properly. Use of gloves cannot replace regular hand-washing. Please refer to the “Personal Hygiene” section.
- Ideally, slice meats upon an order or a purchase.

Consumer advice

4

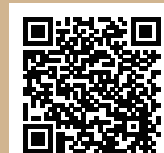


Providing consumer advice on raw or undercooked foods on menus helps consumers to make informed food choices. By doing so, restaurant owners not only help protect consumers, especially susceptible populations, from foodborne illnesses, but also promote their image as responsible food businesses. Alternatively, food business operators could offer well-cooked options for susceptible populations.



How to Provide Consumer Advice

For more information on providing consumer advice, please refer to the CFS's *Guidelines for Food Businesses on Providing Consumer Advice on High-risk Foods on Menus*.



Training on Good Hygiene Practices 5



Any staff who work with food in food premises should be trained before reporting duty to ensure that they are familiar with the working environment and adhere to safe food preparation practices. Adherence to Good Hygiene Practices can help address both foodborne pathogens and “superbugs”.

Safe Kitchen

Food Safety Guide: An Illustrated Guide to Good Hygiene Practices for Food Handlers published by the CFS covers Good Hygiene Practices necessary for working in a kitchen. All food handlers are advised to go through the training materials before work.



Conclusion

Follow 5 Keys to Food Safety

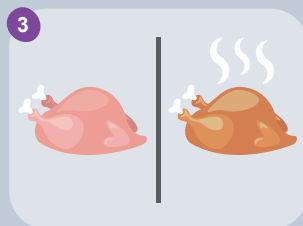
By following "Five Keys to Food Safety", food handlers can help prevent the spread of foodborne diseases and "superbugs" while preparing ready-to-eat foods.



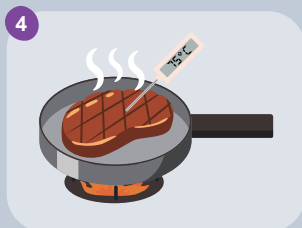
1 Choose
Choose safe raw materials



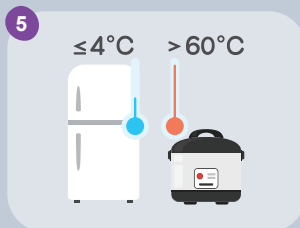
2 Clean
Keep hands and utensils clean



3 Separate
Separate raw and cooked food



4 Cook
Cook thoroughly



5 Safe Temperature
Keep food at safe temperature