Correct hand washing is important

Correctly washing your hands is an important step you can take to minimise the risk of foodborne illness in your food business.

Thorough hand washing physically removes dirt, food waste, grease and harmful bacteria and viruses from your hands.

It is a legal requirement for food handlers to wash their hands.

Hand washing facilities

The Food Standards Code requires food premises to have complying hand washing facilities in areas where food handlers work if their hands are likely to be a source of contamination of food.

Additionally if there are toilets on the food premises, hand washing facilities must be provided immediately adjacent to the toilets.

Premises must have complying hand washing facilities

Hand washing facilities must be:

- permanent fixtures,
- connected to, or provided with, a supply of warm running potable water,
- of a size that allows easy and effective hand washing,
- accessible,
- provided with soap and single use towels (or air drier) and a container for used towels, and
- clearly designated for the sole purpose of washing hands, arms and face.

Some premises are required to provide hand washing facilities fitted with non-hand operated taps, eg abattoirs, butcher shops etc. Check with your local council or the NSW Food Authority.

When hands need to be washed

A food handler must wash his/her hands:

- whenever his/her hands are likely to be a source of contamination of food,
- immediately before working with ready-to-eat food, and after handling raw food,
- immediately after using the toilet,
- before commencing or re-commencing handling of food, and
- immediately after smoking, coughing, sneezing, using a handkerchief, eating, drinking or touching his/her hair, scalp or body opening.

Penalties can apply to the food handler for failing to wash his/her hands correctly.

How to properly wash hands

Using the hand washing facilities provided in the food business, follow these steps:

1. Using warm water, wet hands thoroughly including palms, wrists and back of the hands.
2. Thoroughly lather hands with soap.
3. Vigorously rub hands together, cleaning palms, fingers, between fingers, the back of hands, thumbs and wrist, for at least 15 seconds.
4. Thoroughly rinse off the soap.
5. Pat hands dry with a disposable paper towel or use an air dryer.
6. Place the disposable paper towel in the bin.

Use of nail brushes and antibacterial gels

Clean and undamaged nail brushes can be used during hand washing to assist in removing dough and other hard to remove food residues.

Antibacterial gels that are suitable for use around food preparation can be used in addition to hand washing. Antibacterial gels on their own are not a substitute for hand washing.
Thoroughly lather hands with soap

Hand wash issues

If an authorised officer from the NSW Food Authority or local council identifies a hand washing or hand wash facility issue that needs to be rectified, a variety of compliance actions can be initiated.

For further information on the circumstances in which compliance action may be initiated, see the NSW Food Authority Compliance and Enforcement Policy at www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/_Documents/industry_pdf/compliance-enforcement-policy.pdf

About the NSW Food Authority

The NSW Food Authority is the government organisation that helps ensure NSW food is safe and correctly labelled.

It works with consumers, industry and other government organisations to minimise food poisoning by providing information about and regulating the safe production, storage, transport, promotion and preparation of food.

More information

- Your local council environmental health officer can help you with any questions you have about inspection findings or compliance action. They can help clarify what work needs to be done, and in what timeframe.
- visit www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/industry
- phone the helpline on 1300 552 406

Note

This information is a general summary and cannot cover all situations. Food businesses are required to comply with all of the provisions of the Food Standards Code and the Food Act 2003 (NSW).