

Guide to Food Hygiene in Schools and Colleges



Catering in schools and colleges requires a special set of skills — but done well, school lunches can be the highlight of the day AND make a positive impact on learning.



The Safer Food Group's Guide to Food Hygiene in Schools and Colleges complements the learning from the Level 2 Food Hygiene course, with some additional topics of particular interest to this sector. It considers some ways the whole school can get involved in creating a healthy environment where children and staff can share safe food and good nutrition.

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Food Allergies in Schools and Colleges

As the number of children known to have food allergies rises, schools are having to create and adapt their allergy policies to ensure the safety of all children. Managing allergies, especially life threatening ones, can be scary — that's why it is essential to understand and follow your school's allergy policy.

Under section 100 of the Children and Families Act 2014, schools have a duty to support pupils at their school with medical conditions, including allergies. An allergy policy should be in place in every educational setting. This policy should not be restricted to foods eaten in school canteens, it should also cover use of potential allergens in classroom settings — for instance, pasta shapes used in craft activities or sticking plasters in used first aid.

It is important that the allergy policy is understood and implemented by all staff, not just those in lunchtime service. Giving parents access to the policy and helping them understand how it applies to their children helps identify any flaws in the policy and allows them to reinforce key messages at home. Guidance on [writing a school allergy policy](#) can be found as part of the [School Food Standards resources](#), and [further guidance is provided by Allergy UK](#).

School food operations and caterers are also required to comply with the same food allergy legislation as any other food business. This includes declaring allergenic ingredients within the foods they serve and labelling packaged food correctly. In 2022, Natasha's Law was introduced and applies to the labelling of Pre-Packaged for Direct Sale (PPDS) foods. The Food Standards Agency has written specific guidance for PPDS foods within schools, colleges and nurseries.

For up-to-date allergy training for food handlers and supervisors, including their legal responsibilities, [click here](#).

The 14 Allergens



Gluten



Crustaceans



Fish



Peanuts



Soya



Milk



Nuts



Celery



Mustard



Sesame



Sulphites



Lupin



Molluscs



Eggs

Budget busting food safety tips - Reduce food waste through food safety practice

Research by Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), shows that the UK wastes 9.5 million tonnes of food each year, and 70% of this waste comes from hospitality, food service and households. Reducing this waste is great news for the environment, but minimising the food we throw away can also have a significant effect on catering budgets.

Great food safety practices can have a significant effect on reducing food waste. Here are our 5 top tips...

Keep your cool

Ensure your food stays fresh and usable by keeping your fridge and freezer temperatures correct. Your fridge should be between 2°C and 5°C and your freezer should be -18°C or cooler, to ensure that bacteria does not multiply to dangerous levels. Ensure that fridge and freezer checks are included as part of your HACCP plan.

FIFO

Practice good stock management. Keeping accurate lists of your ambient food stores and practicing strict 'First In, First Out' stock management policies ensures you make the most of your produce and information about your stock will be readily available when you plan your menus. Store ambient food in dry, cool, pest proof stock rooms, off the floor and in air-tight containers. Good stock management helps you utilise all ingredients while they are still fresh.

Watch out...

Keep an eye on the use-by dates of fresh produce and quality of your fruit and vegetables. Remember — the use-by date on any food is absolute — you must use it by this date, either by preparing and

serving, or by freezing, to be defrosted and served on a future date. The Safer Food Group's Level 2 Food Hygiene course and the FSA provide a comprehensive list of the rules around preparing, freezing, defrosting and serving food according to use-by dates.

Your freezer is your friend

Used safely, your freezer can be a great cost-saving tool. Many foods can be frozen if you have surplus — including cheese, butter, yoghurt and milk — as long as you freeze on or before the use-by date. Frozen veg and fruit are often cheaper than fresh but can provide equal health benefits, as well as being easy to portion. And seasonal produce can be bought when cost effective, prepared and frozen to provide a treat later on in the school year — perfect!

Oh crumbs!

Making breadcrumbs from stale bread and freezing to use as an ingredient is a great food waste tip — homemade fish fingers, anyone? BUT don't be tempted to do this with bread that has visible signs of decay. Mould is an indicator of the presence of spoilage bacteria, and these are a sign that other, more dangerous pathogens might be present. Don't take risks with the health of children — young bodies can be particularly vulnerable to food poisoning symptoms; it is never OK to remove the mould and serve the bread.

Quick tip — Using External Caterers

When buying in prepared meals from external caterers, make sure you check every delivery carefully, to ensure food is safe. Check food temperatures against the table below (or your agreed SLAs) and don't be afraid to reject a delivery if it does not meet good food hygiene standards. Get chilled or frozen foods into storage as quickly as possible when delivered — within 15 minutes maximum, to minimise time spent in the 'Danger Zone'.

It's useful to have a back up plan in case you need to reject a delivery, as this means you'll feel less pressured into taking food that might not be at optimum quality.

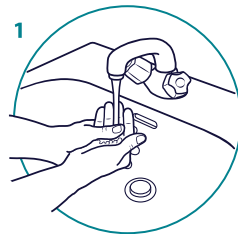
Type of food	Temperature
Hot food	63°C or above
Chilled Food	8°C or below
Frozen Food	-18°C or below



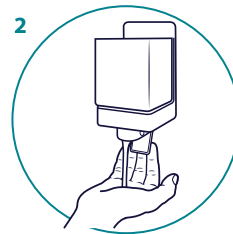
Personal Hygiene in schools

School can be a perfect environment for the rapid spread of pathogens. Close contact, warmth, sharing food and less than perfect personal hygiene are ideal conditions for the growth and spread of bacteria. Young ones can be particularly vulnerable to some debilitating symptoms, so extra care must be taken to stop spread of pathogens in food and via food.

For little ones especially, hand washing can be haphazard at best, and sometimes non-existent. Even with reinforcement of hand washing after toilet breaks, hands are likely to harbour pathogens, which can spread easily when sitting close to each other in the dining hall or classroom, or when sharing food. Hand washing before eating can make a significant impact in reducing the spread of illnesses, so reinforcing this habit at school is a great idea.



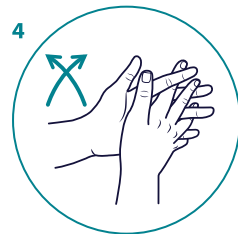
1 Wet hands with clean running water



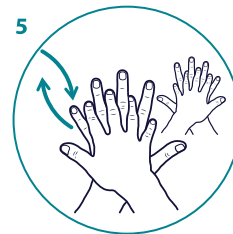
2 Apply enough soap to cover your hands



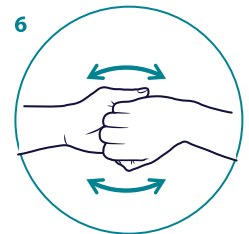
3 Rub hands palm to palm



4 Lather between fingers



5 Scrub between your fingers



6 Rub the backs of fingers on the opposing palms



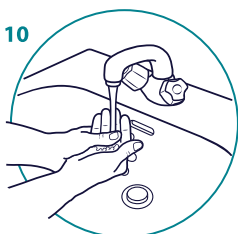
7 Clean thumbs



8 Wash fingernails and fingertips



9 Rub each wrist with opposite hand



10 Rinse hands and wrists under clean running water



11 Dry with a single use towel



12 Your hands are clean and safe

Both staff and children must follow the 48-hour exclusion rule following sickness and / or diarrhoea. Staff shortages can lead to pressure to return to work more quickly, but this runs the risk of creating a greater problem if food borne illnesses are spread to others, so don't be tempted to break this rule. It's also a good idea to have an emergency plan in place to be ready to deal with a food poisoning outbreak.

Even with tip-top personal hygiene, bacteria can sneak through, so enforce a very thorough cleaning routine, in order to break the chain of contamination both within the food preparation area, but crucially also 'front of house'. Follow the manufacturers' instructions and contact times to ensure effective use of detergents and disinfectants. Remember never to spray chemicals near food, crockery or cutlery.





Good hydration

Good hydration is essential for health — and this is particularly true for children's health. Human bodies are composed of 70% water, and the brain is a very thirsty organ. Thinking and learning depletes those water reserves, and restricts our multitasking capacity, working memory and mental flexibility. Children are typically active during school hours too, and good hydration is vital for good physical health and reducing the likelihood of injury.

Because dehydration can happen more quickly in children, it is important to give them access to water throughout the school day and encourage them to drink at regular intervals, especially during warmer periods.

How much should a child drink?

The following guidelines for the amount of fluid to be consumed by children have been created by The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

- Boys and Girls between 4-8: between 1.1-1.3 litres of water daily
- Boys aged 9-13: between 1.5-1.7 litres of water daily
- Girls aged 9-13: between 1.3-1.5 litres of water daily

Some of this fluid will come from food, but mostly — about 80% - should be consumed as drinks, ideally water. This means that, during the school days, children should be drinking:

- Primary School children: 750ml water
- Secondary School children 1ltr water

Encouraging good habits

Remembering to drink water, particularly for busy primary school children, can be a challenge. Lunchtime is the ideal time to build good habits, especially as children take their cue from their friends around them, as well as from the adults who share lunchtimes with them.

Make water jugs and glasses (pre-filled cups for little ones) easily accessible throughout lunchbreak, ideally on every table. Keep an eye out for children who need help filling glasses or empty jugs — easy access to water helps to form that habit.

Encourage them to bring their own water bottles into lunch and help them fill up if necessary. Continuing to drink throughout the day will help to stave off any post lunch energy slump and keep them alert until home time.

Further resources

Standards for school food in England - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-food-standards-resources-for-schools>

Allergy guidance for schools - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

<https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/blog/posts/2022/march-2022/the-importance-of-hydration/>

Prepacked for direct sale (PPDS) allergen labelling changes for schools, colleges and nurseries | Food Standards Agency

www.thesaferfoodgroup.co.uk

For cost effective, accessible food hygiene, allergy, HACCP and safeguarding training. Courses available for food handlers and supervisors.

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