

FW/01: Gastro-intestinal illness in food handlers

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Food that has become contaminated with food poisoning bacteria and viruses may well cause illness. Food can become contaminated by food handlers who are suffering from certain infections, or who are carrying the micro-organisms in or on their person without showing any symptoms of infection.
- 1.2 Any food handler, other employee and/or visitor suffering from symptoms of any such illness or condition likely to directly or indirectly be transmitted through food or to give rise to food poisoning or food-borne illness must be excluded from food handling duties and/or entering *food handling areas.

A *food handling area for the purpose of this procedural guidance includes:

- kitchens and food production areas;
- food stores;
- pot-wash areas;
- restaurant and dining areas;
- food service counters and till areas; and
- wet bars (alcohol).

2.0 Symptoms of gastro-intestinal infection

2.1 The most common symptoms of gastro-intestinal infection are:

- diarrhoea and/or vomiting;
- stomach cramps;
- nausea; or
- fever.

2.2 Diarrhoea is a common condition within the community and for this reason; it is complicated to define in order to exclude all normal variations of bowel habit. Diarrhoea would normally imply a change in someone's normal bowel habit with loose or liquid stools passed more frequently.

2.3 Three or more loose stools within any given 24hr period could well be an indication that it is of an infectious nature, but this can vary. If not followed by other symptoms or further bouts of diarrhoea then it is not likely to be infectious

3.0 Bacterial infection

3.1 If a food-handler is affected the bacteria live and multiply within the gut and are excreted in faeces and/or vomit.

3.2 The possibility of bacteria spreading is at its greatest when an infected person shows symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting as bacteria and loose or liquid stools are more likely to contaminate hands.

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- 3.3 Food-handlers may have infections but show no symptoms, this may be a result of being a long-term carrier, having a mild infection or because they are in the early stages of an illness and symptoms are not yet apparent. For this reason, the regular and effective washing of hands is paramount in reducing the numbers of potential bacteria/viruses on hands. Refer to ***FW/06: Hand wash facilities and effective hand washing.***
- 4.0 Viral infection**
- 4.1 Viruses can spread via contaminated hands and some can spread through the air, especially if an infected person vomits. This characteristic is often what causes large-scale outbreaks of viral infection within enclosed environments.
- 4.2 Viruses can be transmitted through 'ready-to-eat' food and spread in much the same way as bacteria and with similar effects.
- 4.3 Viruses do not have the capability to multiply on food itself but may use food itself as a vehicle for infection. They are capable of surviving on food for long periods of time, however in general, effective cooking of foods easily destroys viruses.
- 5.0 Reporting of vomiting and/or diarrhoea**
- 5.1 Managers and food handlers must comply with the requirements of the appropriate procedure. Refer to ***FW/02: Reporting of vomiting and/or diarrhoea.***

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V3	June 2019	Graham Day; Health & Safety Adviser	Graham Hakes; Senior Health & Safety Adviser