

Hygiene Rules in the Catering Sector

More than 100,000 cases of illness are reported every year in Germany that may have been caused by microorganisms in food, in particular bacteria, viruses or parasites, and experts believe that the number of unreported cases is far higher. Providers who produce meals for third parties bear a great deal of responsibility. Meals must not pose a risk to health and must be of flawless quality. To achieve this goal, it is important that the entire kitchen team pays attention to cleanliness and hygiene during their day-to-day work in the kitchen. This applies to personal and hand hygiene, correct handling of food and cleanliness in the kitchen and in the entire company. The following hygiene rules for employees in the catering sector provide a short and succinct overview of important topics relating to daily work activities in kitchens.



People who work in the catering sector should always pay attention to personal hygiene, correct handling of food and cleanliness at the workplace.

Staff hygiene

Keep yourself clean

Many microorganisms live on your skin and particularly on your scalp but frequent washing helps to prevent them from breeding. This is why personal hygiene is so important. Washing your hair regularly frees the scalp of dandruff, which microorganisms feed on.

Keep your fingernails clean and clipped, and do not use nail varnish

Microorganisms are particularly likely to accumulate under long fingernails. This is why your fingernails should be cut as short as possible. As dirt cannot be seen under nail varnish and as the varnish can flake off, its use is not permitted when working in the kitchen.

Keep your street clothes separate from your workwear

Microorganisms can be brought into the kitchen area via your street clothes, and the use of suitable and clean workwear is therefore mandatory. This clothing must be stored separately from your street clothes in the changing room.

Use fresh workwear and dish towels every day

Microorganisms that can contaminate food accumulate on workwear and dish towels. Change your workwear and the towels used in the kitchen every day. The fabrics should be light-coloured and boil-washable.

Always wear a hat/hair cover in the kitchen area

The human scalp peels off in the form of dandruff from time to time, and we lose hair every day. Dandruff and hair in food are unpleasant and unhygienic because they contain a great many microorganisms. Always wear a hat or hair cover when working. Long hair should be tied up.

Remove rings, bracelets, wristwatches etc. before starting work

Sweat collects under rings, bracelets, wristwatches and the like, and this moisture is the ideal environment for bacteria to breed. Jewellery also prevents you from cleaning your hands and forearms properly. Always remove these objects before starting work. Earrings and chains should also not be worn when working.

Regularly wash and disinfect your hands thoroughly

Our hands come into contact with pathogens practically everywhere. Thorough hand washing using soap and hot water followed by drying using disposable towels prevents these pathogens from being transferred to food. Always wash your hands in the designated washbasins and never in sinks in which food or crockery and cutlery are cleaned. Wash your hands thoroughly before starting work and wash them again regularly between individual work steps. After washing your hands, you should also disinfect them, at least after handling raw foods, in particular meat, poultry and eggs as well as after using the toilet. Observe the in-house instructions on staff hygiene.

Do not cough or sneeze on food

Even healthy people have bacteria in their nose and throat that can result in food poisoning. To ensure that these bacteria and any viruses they contain are not transferred to food via tiny droplets, always turn away from food if you have to cough or sneeze. Cough in your elbow and use a paper tissue to clean your nose. Then throw the tissue away, thoroughly wash your hands and disinfect them.

Cover open wounds using waterproof dressings

Under no circumstances must open wounds come into contact with food, as these wounds may contain food-poisoning bacteria. Wounds must therefore be covered with a water-tight plaster, a clean bandage and a rubber finger cot or a rubber glove. It is advisable to use coloured material where possible, as this will make it easier to recognise if it becomes detached from the wound.

Refrain from smoking

Smoking is strictly prohibited in the kitchen area, as ash or even cigarette butts could end up in the food. This is not only extremely unpleasant but harmful to health.

Immediately report illness or symptoms like repeated diarrhoea and vomiting to the kitchen management

People suffering from a disease that can be passed on via food or who exhibit symptoms that indicate communicable diseases may not handle food and must not enter the kitchen area if there is a risk that pathogens might be transferred. Especially with diarrhoea illnesses, for example, but also with infected wounds or a heavy cold or cough, there is a particular danger that pathogens might be transmitted via food – even if care is taken to ensure good hygiene. It is therefore important for the kitchen management to be informed about such problems without delay.

Inform the kitchen management after returning without vaccination from holiday regions where infectious diseases like hepatitis or diarrhoea illnesses are common, or after having suffered an illness of this kind during your holiday

People infected with hepatitis viruses are already contagious 7 to 14 days before the first symptoms of the disease appear. After diarrhoea illnesses, those affected often still excrete pathogens in their stool even after they have recovered and feel healthy once again. Personal protection measures such as instructions to systematically clean and disinfect hands or allocation of a separate toilet can prevent the spread of pathogens. This is why the kitchen management should always be informed accordingly.

Food hygiene

Only accept incoming goods that are of flawless quality

Harmful microorganisms or parasites can enter the storeroom via food with soiled or damaged packaging, resulting in contamination of the products already stored there. Always check incoming goods for flawless packaging and quality.

Ensure uninterrupted cooling of products

Food that has not been adequately cooled may be spoiled. Check incoming goods to determine whether delivered food is properly cooled. This is particularly important in the case of meat, poultry, fish and dairy products.

Separate clean and unclean work tasks

Microorganisms can be transferred from unclean – in other words microbially contaminated – food or equipment to clean, untainted food during both processing and storage. Products like raw and cooked food must therefore be stored in separate fully covered containers. Used crockery and cutlery may also be contaminated, and food service and crockery return must therefore

take place at different times or in different areas. Never use the same kitchen equipment to prepare raw and cooked foods without cleaning it extremely thoroughly in-between.

Always keep highly perishable foods in cold storage and use them without delay

Many microorganisms already breed extremely rapidly at room temperature, and with some types of bacteria even cooling only slows the process. Always store highly perishable food in line with the specific cooling requirements and use this food quickly. Always observe the details on the packaging regarding shelf life and storage conditions.

Process food products quickly

Food being processed in the kitchen gradually takes on the temperature of the surrounding air, so make sure you process all food and in particularly highly perishable products quickly. This reduces the risk that microorganisms will multiply.



Hygienic work practices are a must during the preparation of food.

Temporarily cool cooked ingredients before further processing

Microorganisms enter food when it is chopped and processed – when potatoes are chopped and mixed with other ingredients, for example. Bacteria can breed particularly quickly when the food is still warm. This is why cooked ingredients must be used quickly or put in cold storage until needed again.

Always cover meals

Always cover food before storage to ensure that it is protected from microorganisms in the air. Suitable ways of covering food include lids, clean crockery or food-safe film or foil.

Allow large pieces of meat and poultry as well as whole poultry to thaw fully prior to preparation

Large pieces of meat joints and poultry as well as whole poultry thaw more slowly than flat, thin pieces. If the core of the product is still frozen, the cooking time and temperatures may not be sufficient to ensure full cooking. This means that microorganisms are not reliably destroyed and can multiply once again when the product cools.

Throw away thawing liquid from poultry and meat

Thawing liquid often contains microorganisms that can contaminate and poison food. It must not under any circumstances come into contact with other foods. The best thing is to mop up the thawing liquid using disposable towels and immediately to thoroughly clean and then disinfect your hands and all surfaces and objects that have come into contact with the thawing water.

Taste food in the proper manner

When tasting food, take care to ensure that your own saliva does not come into contact with the food being prepared, as we naturally all have microorganisms in our mouth. Use a clean spoon to take a small sample of the food and then tip the food into a small bowl or directly onto another spoon you intend to use for tasting. This ensures that the food itself remains untainted.

Do not touch prepared meals and the interior surfaces of crockery with your bare hands

Microorganisms are always present on our hands and can be transferred to food or crockery/cutlery if you touch these with your bare hands. Therefore, always wear clean gloves when portioning or mixing food that will not be subsequently heated. Do not touch the interior surfaces of crockery with your bare hands.

Ensure that meals are adequately heated

Heat destroys most microorganisms. What is important is that food is heated to 72 degrees Celsius for two minutes – and not just on the surface but also at its core. This also applies to food that has been temporarily put into cold storage and subsequently served hot. To be on the safe side, you can check the core temperature using a thermometer.

When serving food: do not keep meals hot at temperatures below 65 degrees Celsius

Many germs breed particularly rapidly at temperatures between 15 and 55 degrees Celsius. Hot food held ready for service must have a temperature of at least 65 degrees Celsius. Food should not be kept hot for longer than three hours.

Cool food as quickly as possible

To be on the safe side and to prevent germs from breeding, you should make sure that, during the cooling process, the food cools from 65 degrees Celsius to 10 degrees Celsius within the space of two hours. If necessary, therefore, fill the food into smaller containers for cooling. The smaller the quantity, the faster the food cools.

Kitchen hygiene

Keep a tidy kitchen

Objects that are not needed for kitchen work do not belong in the kitchen, as they can be responsible for the transfer of dirt and microorganisms to food. Remove empty transport containers – such as those used for fruit, vegetables or dairy products – or empty cans from the kitchen area without delay.

Keep kitchen, storage rooms and work equipment clean

Microorganisms can easily breed in soiled rooms and on dirty equipment, but if the rooms are clean and the machines and equipment are properly cleaned, the germs have nothing to feed on and cannot grow. Therefore, always clean machines and equipment with hot water and detergent immediately after use.

Regularly clean your workplace between tasks using clean – preferably disposable – cloths

Food remains and soiling dry quickly and are then very difficult to remove. They form germ pockets that cannot be seen with the naked eye. Thoroughly clean your workplace after each work step. Dirty cloths that have been re-used often contain a high number of microorganisms that are transferred to work surfaces or equipment during cleaning. You should therefore use fresh cloths every day or use disposable cloths that you can throw away.

Do not overfill cold-storage rooms

Overfilling cold-storage rooms affects their cooling performance; the internal temperature falls, making it easier for microorganisms to breed. This is why sufficient cold-storage capacities are necessary. Also make sure that it is not necessary to put too much food into cold storage at the same time.

Do not re-adjust the temperature and cleaning duration of the dishwasher

Food remains on cleaned crockery and cutlery not only look unpleasant but can serve as „food“ for microorganisms. Even if time is of the essence, you must wait until the dishwasher has completed its full cycle. Also observe the guidelines on temperature and quantity of detergent, as this is the only way to ensure flawless cleaning results.

Store detergents and disinfectants outside the kitchen

Cleaning agents, disinfectants and pesticides can contaminate food. They must not come into contact with food and must therefore be stored outside the kitchen. Accidental consumption can cause internal burns and poisoning.

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