

Chapter 13:

Personal Hygiene

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, you will be able to:

- Link the importance of good personal hygiene including cleanliness to food safety
- Appreciate the value of training personnel in good hygiene practices
- Develop a plan that includes standard operating procedures and record templates for your employees regarding hygiene issues

Chapter 13: Personal Hygiene



No Coughs or Sneezes Please!

Liane and Pam hire their niece, Jane, and nephews, Jason and Kevin, to help at the markets during the busy summer months. A week before the first market they hold a staff training day on sales techniques, production practices, food safety, personal hygiene, record keeping and special ordering. Everyone knows not to chew gum, wear jewelry, smoke and eat while at the market booth. They are taught proper handwashing and are frequently seen at the urban market scrubbing their hands to the tune of Happy Birthday. Food safety is also a component of the training for their field and greenhouse staff.

After working at the outdoor markets during a heavy July downpour, Jane comes down with a bad cold. She arrives at the market next week feeling poorly. By the time setup is completed, Jane is sneezing and coughing. Concerned that Jane's sneezing will contaminate the produce, Liane sends her home and works the market with Jason.



Good personal hygiene is essential for preventing foodborne illness; it also makes good business sense.

Hazards

Proper personnel procedures and training for food safety reduce the risk of contamination from hazards. Some sources of these hazards are:

- Biological hazards from contamination with microorganisms from improperly washed hands, soiled clothing and poor personal hygiene
- Chemical hazards from contamination with cleaners and sanitizers that are not properly rinsed from hands or gloves before handling food
- Physical hazards from foreign objects such as pens, pencils, false fingernails or jewelry that fall into food

Personal Hygiene

People are the most important link in preventing foodborne illness. The personal cleanliness of all food handlers is extremely important in the operation of all food establishments. Good personal hygiene is not only essential to preventing foodborne illness, it also makes good business sense. Customers like to deal with personnel who take hygiene seriously and practice safe food handling.

Hygiene – conditions and practices followed to maintain health, including sanitation and personal cleanliness.

Cleanliness and Conduct

As a farm direct marketer you must do all you practically can to make sure that people in your establishment do not contaminate food. This includes you and your staff but also others who come on site such as trades people, visitors and customers. Everyone within a food establishment must maintain an appropriate degree of personal cleanliness and take precautions to prevent food contamination.

Operators of a food business, including a farmers' market, should:

- Take steps to prevent smoking or spitting on site. Consider posting 'No Smoking' signs at all entrances.
- Require hand washing after eating, smoking and using the washroom.
- Ensure you and your staff always wear clean clothing. Consider providing your food handlers with clean aprons which serve as a barrier between their clothing and the food they handle. Clothing should be free of loose fastenings such as buttons that may fall into the food. Avoid having pens or pencils in breast pockets as they could easily fall out and drop into the food. Footwear should be as clean as possible.
- Encourage your staff to keep their hands away from their mouth, nose and hair, and never cough or sneeze near food. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and thoroughly wash hands immediately afterwards.
- Limit jewelry to plain band rings. Necklaces, bracelets, earrings and other jewelry (excluding medical alert jewelry) should not be worn, especially if handling unpackaged food.
- Control hair by wearing hair restraints such as hairnets, hats or scarves. Hair clips or bobby pins should not be used by you and your staff because they can fall into food.
- Store personal effects, clothing and lunches in a separate area away from food.
- Take coffee breaks and meals in designated areas away from food handling areas.

Farmers' market managers should encourage vendors not to eat, drink, smoke or chew gum or tobacco while in their market stall.

Take the appropriate steps to ensure that food isn't contaminated by the people within your food establishment.

In food handling areas there is NO:

- *Smoking*
- *Spitting*
- *Gum chewing*
- *Drinking*
- *Eating*

Hand washing is the single most effective means of preventing the spread of pathogens.

Alcohol based hand sanitizers can be used when facilities are lacking and hands aren't dirty.

Hand Washing

Hand washing is the single most effective means of preventing the spread of pathogens that can cause infections and foodborne illness. Proper hand washing is essential for everyone handling food.

Although correct hand washing might seem like common sense, most people do not wash their hands thoroughly enough. Extra care needs to be taken to properly and frequently wash hands when handling potentially hazardous foods.

Ensure that the facility where you sell your food has proper hand washing facilities and that hand washing stations are not used for utensil or general cleaning purposes. Hand washing notices **must** be posted in each washroom and at each hand washing station.



For more information on proper hand washing facilities see Chapter 8: Premises.

Alcohol based hand sanitizers are adequate when hand washing facilities are lacking and hands are not soiled with dirt. There is no advantage to using anti-bacterial soap. Soap allows soil and other contaminants to be removed more easily, but it is the process of scrubbing the hands that effectively reduces the hazard, not the soap.

Proper Hand Washing Technique

- Wet hands with clean, warm potable water.
- Apply soap and work into a lather. Use liquid soap; bar soap is not recommended because it may be contaminated with foreign objects.
- Rub hands together for at least 20 seconds (sing the Happy Birthday song or Twinkle Twinkle Little Star to yourself – that takes about 20 seconds). Wash all surfaces thoroughly including wrists, palms, back of hands, finger tips, between fingers and under fingernails. Ideally, you should use a nailbrush to clean under your nails; however, the brush must be kept clean and sanitary.
- Rinse under clean, running water.
- Dry hands with a single use towel.
- Turn off the tap with the paper towel.
- Dispose of paper towel in a waste container.

Keeping fingernails trimmed makes them easier to clean. Food handlers should not wear false or acrylic nails or nail polish.



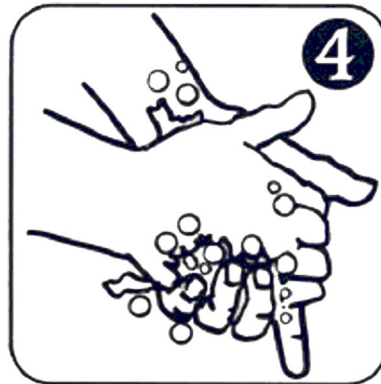
Wet hands with warm water.



Apply soap and make a lather.



Scrub palms, back of hands and between fingers.



Rub and scrub thoroughly for 20 seconds.



Rinse well.



Dry completely with paper towel.

Figure 13.1 Proper Hand Washing Procedures

Wash Your Hands

- Before handling food
- Before starting work
- After using the washroom
- Before and after handling potentially hazardous foods
- After handling the garbage or trash
- After every break
- After smoking, eating, drinking, or chewing gum or tobacco
- After sneezing, coughing or using a tissue
- After handling animals
- After any other activity where hands become soiled

Wearing disposable gloves is not a substitute for appropriate, effective and frequent hand washing.

Using Gloves

Many operators feel that wearing gloves prevents the transmission of pathogens; however, wearing gloves is not a substitute for appropriate, effective and frequent hand washing.

Gloves can create microenvironments that increase the bacterial load on your hands. Your hands can get very sweaty when you wear gloves for long periods of time; the warm temperatures and high moisture level create an ideal environment for bacteria to grow. Using gloves properly requires training.

Proper Use of Gloves

- Gloves must fit properly; treat them as a second skin.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water before and after gloves are worn.
- Discard gloves that are torn or damaged.
- Change gloves whenever you change an activity or handle anything that is not sanitary, for example, after you accept money from a customer and before you handle food again.
- Replace your gloves after sneezing, coughing, touching the face or hair, picking up an item from the floor, handling money and after handling cleaning and sanitizing chemicals.
- Change gloves if you have worn them for more than two hours, even if you're still doing the same activity.

Hygiene and Health

Some illnesses can be passed onto others through food. Establish preventative measures to minimize the risks of contaminating food by staff with communicable diseases or infections. Employees suffering from a fever, persistent cough, sore throats, vomiting or diarrhea **must** notify you. Ideally, ill workers should be sent home, especially if they are vomiting or have diarrhea. At the very least, assign them duties that minimize their contact with food and food handling equipment.

Cuts and abrasions are common during food handling. Ensure that all employees know what to do if they get hurt. Have a first aid kit on site and written procedures on handling injuries.



For more information on what should be in a well stocked first aid kit visit the website of the St. John Ambulance at www.stjohn.ab.ca/. Click on “First Aid Kits and Supplies” and then on “Workplace Kits.”

Treat any cuts, wounds or open sores on the hands and arms and cover with clean, waterproof bandages. If the wound is on the hands, wear disposable gloves overtop the bandaged hand. You need to reassign people with visible injuries, such as cuts on their hands, to non-food handling duties whenever possible.



First Aid Kits

Check out your first aid kits.

- Are they conveniently located?
- Are they properly stocked?
- Do staff know where they are located?

Keeping Records

Maintaining accurate records is essential for farm direct marketers. Keep training records for each staff member documenting date of training and subject matter. Monitor the effectiveness of your training by observing staff in action.

Staff sick with a communicable disease or infection should be sent home or reassigned to non-food handling duties.

Treat cuts, wounds or open sores on the arms and hands with clean waterproof bandages.

Staff Training

An important way to prevent contamination of food is to maintain high standards of personal hygiene and cleanliness. As a farm direct marketer it is your responsibility to ensure that you and your staff have the knowledge and skills required to handle food safely. Train all employees, from the person standing behind the counter selling your product to the person who cleans the establishment in the evening.

It is your responsibility to establish and enforce a code of sanitary practices for workers. Develop a written program, with periodic updates, that provides appropriate training in personal hygiene and hygienic handling of food. The training should include requirements of personal hygiene and the reasons why they are important. Set a good example for staff and always abide by these hygiene requirements.

“Food safety training is important to our staff. It ensures that they know the regulations and the concerns that come with the products we are selling at the farmers’ markets. They aren’t intimidated when a health inspector comes around. They know what they are supposed to be doing and how to do it. We know our customers are getting a food safe product.” Leona Staples, Innisfail Growers/The Jungle U-Pick Farm

Encourage staff to:

- Wear clean clothes and aprons
- Properly restrain the hair
- Avoid wearing jewelry while handling food
- Regularly wash hands, especially after handling raw or potentially hazardous foods and using the washroom
- Wherever possible avoid directly handling or touching the food – use tongs or other utensils
- Not eat, smoke or chew gum while preparing or handling food or the equipment and supplies used in food preparation
- Never sneeze or cough over food, utensils or food handling equipment
- Cover cuts or sores on the arms and hands with waterproof dressings
- Avoid touching the face, beard or hair while handling food
- Stay home if they are suffering from a skin infection, upset stomach or diarrhea

Staff should:

- *Wear clean clothes*
- *Restrain their hair*
- *Regularly wash their hands*



Food Safety Plan – Personnel

A written food safety plan for personnel should emphasize the hygiene requirements and the skills employees must be able to demonstrate.

Focus on the following:

- Condition and suitability of personal attire
- Hand washing standards
- Personal hygiene standards
- Unacceptable behaviours in food handling areas
- Personal health and reporting requirements
- Procedures to be followed if you have an ill food handler
- Procedures for corrective action when mistakes happen
- Who is responsible for monitoring

It is your responsibility to ensure that employees are provided with adequate facilities and properly trained on personal hygiene practices.

Remember it is your responsibility to ensure that employees are properly trained on personal hygiene practices and provided with adequate facilities, including a place where they can eat and change clothes. Locate facilities for staff in convenient areas to encourage their use.



Take the time to continue developing your food safety plan. Create a section in your binder for Personal Hygiene. Use the information in this chapter to build this component of your plan.

Summary

Your farm direct marketing venue should not be a source of contamination. Personnel training is a very important component of food safety and the prevention of foodborne illness. An essential element of training **must** be proper hand washing techniques and when it must be done.

The role of food handlers is paramount to the prevention of food poisoning. All staff must have a good understanding of personal cleanliness and hygiene and what is expected of them.

“We’ve made a number of changes recently because of food safety. All our employees are required to wear gloves as they harvest and package vegetables. They are to wear hairnets or hats. Our employees are required to tell us if they are ill and they are asked to stay home until they are well enough.” Helen Doef, Doef’s Greenhouses Ltd.

Market Manager Responsibilities

As a manager of an Alberta Approved Farmers’ Market you **must** make certain that the market is a safe place for food to be sold. Good hygiene practices by employees, vendors and customers will help guarantee that your venue does not contribute to the contamination of food with microbial, chemical or physical hazards.

As you walk through the farmers’ market, make visual checks to ensure that all vendors are doing their part to ensure the safety of the food being sold. If you observe any vendors not meeting their responsibilities bring this to their attention.

Monitor vendors and market staff to ensure that they are:

- Wearing clean and appropriate clothing
- Wearing minimal jewelry and no nail polish
- Changing gloves, if worn, frequently
- Restraining hair under a cap, scarf or net
- Washing their hands frequently
- Refraining from eating, smoking, chewing gum or tobacco at their tables

You also have the responsibility to ensure that:

- A well stocked first aid kit is available
- Vendors know where it is located
- Washrooms are always clean and well stocked



Food Safety Checklists

Use the Market Startup and Weekly Food Safety Checklist for Market Managers in Appendix M to help you monitor your market. Add any personal hygiene issues that are missing for your market. Remember you and your vendors should be using the checklists every market day.

What's Next

Do you know how to sample your food products safely? At the market, should the strawberry tarts be sitting right next to the baskets of fresh strawberries? How do proper food handling practices reduce the risk of foodborne illness? Learn more about proper food handling practices and why they are so important in Chapter 14: Food Handling.



Resources

If you need more information or have food safety questions about this chapter contact:

Safe Food Systems
 Agri-Food Systems Branch, Food Safety Division
 Alberta Agriculture, Food & Rural Development
 Phone: (780) 427-4054. Dial 310-0000 first for toll free access.



Chapter Review

Take a moment to review the chapter by answering True or False to the following statements.

1. Hand washing is the most effective means of preventing the spread of pathogens that can cause infections and foodborne illness. _____
2. Wearing disposable gloves is a good substitute for washing your hands, especially in a busy market. _____
3. When washing hands, after applying the soap rub your hands together for 10 seconds. _____
4. It is the responsibility of the farmers' market manager to post "No Smoking" signs throughout the market. _____
5. An employee that becomes ill may wash vegetables for sale at a market with little risk of contamination. _____
6. A farm direct marketer selling prepackaged bagels should wear disposable gloves when handling money. _____

Answers to Chapter Review

- 1) True
- 2) False, gloves become contaminated in the same way as hands and need to be washed, replaced or removed before handling hazardous materials
- 3) False, hands should be rubbed together for at least 20 seconds
- 4) True
- 5) False, a sick employee would contaminate the vegetables while handling them. Have sick staff work with non-food related activities.
- 6) False, although the exchange of money will contaminate hands, prepackaged goods are protected from such cross contamination