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Guidance on dish cloth hygiene

Introduction

Surveys have found that dish cloths used in commercial kitchens have high bacteria levels, including **E. coli**. When combined with limited hygiene knowledge this can lead to the spread of food borne illness.

Cloths used for wiping food preparation surfaces become soiled very quickly. They are often wet and tend to be used for both clean and dirty surfaces, spreading bacteria from one surface to another (cross contamination). There is little point in providing separate surfaces for different food preparations if all surfaces are cleaned with the same cloth.

Dish cloths offer the perfect environment for bacterial growth on ingrained residual foodstuffs, dirt and grease, which can lead to food poisoning. It is especially important to protect ready-to-eat food from bacteria. This is because the food will not be cooked, so any bacteria on the food will not be killed.

Tips to prevent dish cloth cross contamination

These simple tips can help reduce the possibility of cross contamination caused by dish cloths in your premises:

- Where possible replace cleaning cloths with paper towel/single use cloths to eliminate the need to wash and sanitise the cloth regularly;
- Replace cloths on a regular basis, especially if frayed or torn;
- Colour code your cleaning cloths for the different areas and chemicals that they are being used for;
- Wash the dish cloth out **after each use**, using hot water and detergent. Immerse cloth in boiling water for 2 minutes and leave to air dry before reusing;

- Ideally cloths should be washed daily in a washing machine or dishwasher on a hot cycle;
- Clean cloths should be provided at the start of each working day;
- Have a designated place in the kitchen for dirty cloths to prevent them from being reused before being washed.

Dirty tea towels can also spread bacteria, so it is important to wash them regularly and use them for their specific purpose only.

Cleaning Products

When cleaning cloths it is important to use the correct cleaning products:

- **Detergents** or **degreasers** clean items that are dirty but do not kill bacteria;
- **Disinfectants** kill bacteria but do not have cleaning properties. When used in food preparation areas they should be of a 'food safe' type;
- **Sanitisers** are 2 in 1 chemical with detergent and disinfectant properties. When used in food preparation areas they should be of a 'food safe' type;
- **Antibacterial products** may or may not clean and disinfect. Labels should be thoroughly checked to find out if suitable;
- **Bleach** is a disinfectant but is not 'food safe' so should not be used on food contact surfaces.

For further information contact:

Torbay Council - Food and Safety Team

Roebuck House

Abbey Road

Torquay

TQ2 5EJ

Tel: 01803 208010

Email: food.safety@torbay.gov.uk

This document can be made available in other formats. For further information please contact (01803) 208010.