

Food & Safety

BULLETIN

Summer 2014

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Welcome to the 6th edition of our 'new-look' Food & Safety Bulletin, As usual, we have also included articles of interest on food safety and health and safety that are likely to be relevant to your business.

If you would like any help or advice on any of the articles in this edition please contact a member of the Team on the details below.

Wishing you a successful 2014 season

Helen Perkins - Principal Environmental Health Officer, Community Safety

New food labelling regulations are on their way!

The current food labelling regulations are being replaced by the Food Information Regulations. The new regulations consolidate the existing food labelling legislation. While most of the food labelling provisions remain unchanged, the provisions in certain areas have been tightened. These include:

- Allergen information will be required to be displayed on food that is sold loose and caterers will need to be able to provide allergen information to their customers.
- Country of origin – from April 2015 origin requirements will be extended to fresh and frozen meat from pigs, sheep, goats and poultry.
- Nutrition labelling will become compulsory on most pre-packed foods from 2016
- Date marking – use by dates will be more closely linked to food safety. For frozen meat and fish there will also be a date of first freezing shown on food labels.
- A minimum font size for compulsory information will improve clarity.
- High caffeine drinks will require additional labelling.
- Added water in certain meat and fishery products will need to be shown in the name of the food if it makes up more than 55% of the final product.

If you need advice on food labelling, please contact trading standards via the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on **08454 04 05 06** or trading.standards@torbay.gov.uk



What is food poisoning?

Food poisoning is an illness which occurs after eating or drinking food contaminated by bacteria. Although most bacteria are harmless, a few can cause illness. The symptoms depend on the type of bacteria but abdominal pain, diarrhoea, vomiting and nausea, are the most common. Other symptoms include fever and headaches. Depending on the cause, the illness can last from 12 hours to two weeks, or in extreme cases even longer. The Food Standards Agency estimates that food poisoning affects up to 5.5 million people in the UK each year.

What service does the council provide?

The council will investigate food poisoning cases, in order to try and prevent the spread of illness and find out what has caused it. In order for the council to investigate a case, a stool specimen will need to be provided to a doctor. This is to determine whether the illness is food poisoning and if so, the bacteria that has caused the illness.

What if my job involves handling food or caring for people?

If an individual works with food or vulnerable groups of people (such as the young, elderly or those with weakened immune systems) and contracts food poisoning, they will need to inform their employer and not return to work until they have been symptom free for 48 hours. There are also some infections, such as E Coli 0157, that require negative stool samples before returning back to work.

How can I prevent food poisoning?

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water and dry them before handling food, after handling raw foods including meat, fish, eggs and vegetables, as well as after touching the bin, going to the toilet, blowing your nose etc.
- Wash worktops before and after preparing food, particularly after they've been touched by raw meat, including poultry, raw eggs, fish and vegetables. Any disinfectant or sanitisers used must at least meet the official standards of BS EN1276:1997 or BS EN 13697:2001. You can check with your supplier that they meet the required standards.
- Wash dishcloths and tea towels regularly. Re-usable cloths should be washed on a hot cycle at 82°C or above and let them dry between tasks. Dirty, damp cloths are the perfect place for bacteria to breed.
- Use separate chopping boards for raw food and ready-to-eat foods.
- Always cover raw meat and store it on the bottom shelf of the fridge, where it can't touch or drip onto other foods.
- Cook food thoroughly and check that it's piping hot all the way through. A probe thermometer can also be used to ensure it reaches a safe core temperature. 75°C or above is advised.
- Keep your fridge temperature below 5°C.
- Cool hot foods as quickly as possible (within 90 minutes) and store them in the fridge or freezer. Use any leftovers from the fridge within two days.
- Don't eat food that's past its "use-by" date.

What are approved premises?

All food production establishments are subject to food hygiene inspection by the relevant authority. However, larger premises that produce meat, dairy, fish, and shellfish-based products have to meet a higher level of hygiene criteria in order to obtain permission (approval) to produce food.

Approved premises have to meet high hygiene, structural and training standards, as well as implementing a more comprehensive documented system for food safety (HACCP).

In Torbay we currently have 17 approved premises, the majority of which are involved in producing fish, shellfish and crab based products.

Meat cutting plants and abattoirs are inspected by officers employed directly by the Food Standards Agency, but all other food premises are inspected by local council employed Environmental Health Officers (EHOs).

Approved premises may also be visited by inspectors from the EU at any time, in order to verify that national standards are consistent with those in place across the rest of the EU.

More information on approved premises can be found on the Food Standards Agency website

www.food.gov.uk/

Foods that have come from approved premises have to display on their packaging a unique premises approval number. For all food processed in the EU this information is found in the form of an oval and can typically be found on milk cartons, raw meat or packs of filleted fish.

UK
TP 001
EC

ATP Monitoring

What is an ATP monitor?

This is a simple, instant test to check cleaning effectiveness and identify sources of contamination.

The monitor is an electronic measuring device which measures adenosine triphosphate (ATP), which is the universal energy molecule found in all animal, plant, bacteria, yeast and mould cells. When food or organic residue is left on a surface, it can grow bacteria, cause cross-contamination, develop bio-film and many other problems that can compromise food quality and safety.

The test cannot differentiate between harmful and harmless sources of ATP. However, proper and effective cleaning should remove all organic matter, therefore high readings show that cleaning was inadequate and a risk is present.



Environmental Health Officers have started to use these monitors as a small part of their standard inspection. This can either be to confirm that effective cleaning is taking place, or as a way of showing business owners that cleaning needs to be improved. This may be the way cleaning is done, the equipment or the products which are used.

Why is this a problem?

Some bacteria can cause harm, especially if they are transferred from a work surface onto ready to eat food (e.g. from a chopping board to sandwiches). Hand contact surfaces such as fridge and tap handles also need to be kept clean to prevent food from becoming contaminated from these sources. Some bacteria, such as E.coli only require a small number of organisms to cause illness.

How is the test done?

A measured swab will be taken from the surface to be tested. This is placed in a tube and mixed with a special reagent. When placed in the machine a test is run and the ATP reading is displayed. Different surfaces are expected to reach different standards of cleanliness. For example, chopping boards would need to be cleaner than the floor from a food safety perspective. The higher the reading, the more contamination is present.

We are finding a wide range of results from 2 to over 3,000. Results should normally be below 100. The common reasons found from high readings are:

- areas being missed completely from the cleaning schedule, such as light switches and wash basin taps
- dirty cloths being used and moving bacteria around
- poor surfaces which are hard to clean, such as very marked chopping boards
- poor cleaning technique, such as not removing the grease and dirt first before using a sanitizer
- incorrect products being used for cleaning, e.g. such as window cleaner for work surfaces
- not leaving the product to work as the instructions state. For example some chemicals need to have a contact time of 15 minutes and others just need to be sprayed on and wiped off.

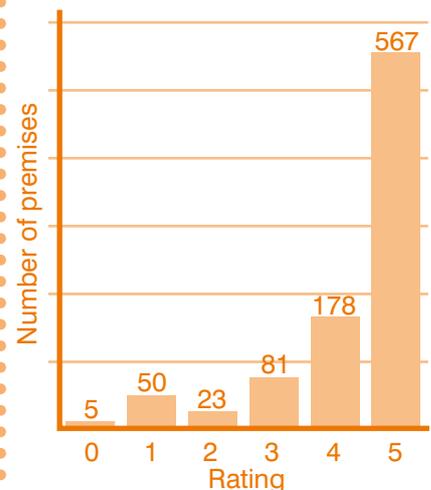
What do we do with the results?

Poor results are discussed with the food business along with how they could improve their cleaning. The results are not used to take formal action but as an educational tool and as a possible precursor to formal testing where standards do not improve in the future.

Food Hygiene Rating Scheme Update

In November 2011 the Food and Safety team launched the National Food Hygiene Rating scheme in Torbay which is progressing well and driving up standards in Torbay.

As of the end of March 2014, 904 food businesses have been rated in Torbay so far; see the table for a breakdown of scores.



In 2013/14 41 requests for rescoring have been received. Of these, 40 have improved as a result and achieved a better food hygiene rating. If you have been given a low rating, we would encourage you to put in a request for a rescore, the form you will need to fill in can be found at www.torbay.gov.uk/rescorevisit

In Wales it is now a legal requirement to display the food hygiene score in the food business. England are currently in discussions on this matter so in the future you may legally have to display your rating.

There is an app available for smart phones which can be downloaded from <http://ratings.food.gov.uk/>. Check out where to eat in Torbay and the rest of the UK whilst out and about.

Further information on the rating scheme can be found at www.torbay.gov.uk/fhrs

“Cockles and Mussels alive, alive... oh”

The relatively good water quality of Torbay and its weather protected location make it an ideal location for producing shellfish such as mussels. One shellfish farmer has established a thriving deep water mussel farm near to the port of Brixham, whose products are to be found in many of the UK's top restaurants.

Shellfish such as mussels are Bi-valve molluscs, a characteristic of which is that they filter feed nutrients from the surrounding water. Bivalve molluscs are however susceptible to poor water quality requiring them to be purified at an approved establishment in order that any bacterial contamination that may have been in the sea water can be flushed out.

A legal responsibility of Environmental Health Officers is to take fortnightly samples directly from the deep water mussel bed. One purpose of this sampling is to verify that the shellfish are within safe limits of contamination such that the purifying process will provide a safe product. Shellfish samples are bagged, cooled and despatched to the Public Health England laboratories at Porton Down, Wiltshire.

Another function of this sampling is to monitor shellfish for potential contamination from marine biotoxins.

Marine biotoxins which can produce serious adverse health effects in humans are produced by algae. Under certain conditions algae can multiply to excessive levels in sea water. Marine biotoxins cannot be flushed out of shellfish but instead

accumulate in the fleshy parts of the animal. In order to monitor for their presence, at each sampling trip a sample of sea water is sent for analysis at a laboratory in Lowestoft Suffolk, and a sample of Mussels are sent for analysis at another laboratory in Weymouth. If toxin levels are found to be excessive the Mussel Bed is closed by the local authority until safe levels return.



If you are handling fresh mussels in a catering establishment, store them with care, remember they are a live product.

- Only purchase from approved suppliers.
- Do not re-immers in water during storage.
- Do not exceed the use by date.
- Do not serve mussels that remain closed after cooking.

Herb Sampling

Following national food poisoning outbreaks associated with whole leaf herbs which have caused concern over the risks they may pose to the general population, the Food and Safety Team took part in a National Fresh Herb Sampling Programme. Six samples of fresh imported mint, coriander and dill were sampled from local retailers and analysed for microbiological quality. We are pleased to report that all the samples came back as satisfactory.

Gas Safety in Catering

Since 2011 officer from Torbay Council, as part of a wider Devon project, have undertaken work in relation to “Gas Safety in Catering”. Whilst the percentage of compliant premises was initially low (around 20%), this has now changed significantly with over 75% of premises now meeting their legal obligations. Over the last three years officers have identified a significant number of dangerous situations including gas leaks and with the support of Gas Safe and the Health and Safety Executive

have taken formal action against a number of engineers working illegally or out of scope.

Gas systems must be regularly maintained by a competent person to ensure that they are safe to use. When anyone works on your gas system or appliances you must ensure that they are suitably qualified for the type of work that they are undertaking. The easiest way to do this is to check their Gas Safe identification card and/or check at www.gassaferegister.co.uk

Food Allergy Update

Current allergen labelling rules will be changing on 13 December 2014.

Under the new rules, allergens will have to be emphasised in the ingredients list on the label, for example by listing them in bold.

The 14 major allergens are:

Cereals containing gluten, crustaceans (prawns, crabs, lobster, crayfish), eggs, fish, peanuts, soybeans, milk, nuts, celery, mustard, sesame, sulphur dioxide, lupin, molluscs (clams, mussels, whelks, oysters, snails and squid)

In addition, it will no longer be permitted to use statements such as 'contains: nuts, mustard'

Non-prepacked foods

Currently, caterers and food retailers selling food prepared or wrapped on site don't have to provide information about food allergens.

This will change from 13 December 2014. From this date, information on any of the 14 allergens used as ingredients will need to be provided for foods sold without packaging or wrapped on site. This information could be written down on a chalk board or chart, or provided orally by a member of staff. Where the specific allergen information is not provided upfront, clear signposting to where this information could be obtained must be provided.

Consumers who are eating out can provide caterers with 'chef cards' that list the foods they are allergic to. These help caterers understand exactly which foods their customers need to avoid.



Public Health – it's your business too!

The number of obese people in England has been rising sharply over the last 20 years. One in four adults is considered obese in England, compared to less than 15% in 1993. By 2050 it is predicted that these figures will double. Childhood obesity is also of concern in Torbay particularly amongst the 4 to 6 year olds.

Amongst some of the issues that are thought to contribute to this rise is unhealthy eating. The Government document Healthy Lives Healthy People concluded that all sections of society have a role to play including the food and drink industry.

As Public Health is now part of Torbay Council, the authority is well placed to address the issues at a local level.

This is where you come in

The Food Safety team are starting to look at potential areas of work which may contribute to a reduction in obesity e.g. the provision of healthy choices on children's menus, healthy catering techniques using less fat, salt etc.

If you have any good ideas of how we can make an improvement in this area or would like to get involved in some way such as being part of a pilot project then please email Helen Perkins helen.perkins@torbay.gov.uk

Don't wash raw chicken

Splashing water from washing chicken can spread campylobacter. Thorough cooking kills it.

Campylobacter is the most common cause of food poisoning in the UK and typically causes abdominal pain and diarrhoea for between two to five days.

Follow these four rules to prevent campylobacter:

1. Cover raw chicken and store at the bottom of the fridge so juices cannot drip onto other foods.
2. Don't wash raw chicken, as it can spread germs by splashing.
3. Wash and clean all utensils, chopping boards and surfaces used to prepare raw chicken - don't forget to wash your hands too!
4. Make sure chicken is steaming hot all the way through before serving and that the juices run clear from the thickest part of the meat.

For more information visit www.food.gov.uk/chicken

