Section 5 – Personal hygiene

**Objectives**

- Identify the importance of personal hygiene in the workplace
- Recognise good personal hygiene practices
- Explain how poor personal hygiene practices can cause contamination of food
- State the legal obligations in relation to personal health and hygiene.

Did you know that you can act as a carrier of food poisoning?

Did you know you have a moral and legal responsibility not to contaminate food?

**Personal hygiene is defined as**

- Keeping the body, including the hair and especially the hands, clean.
- Avoiding poor personal hygiene habits
- Wearing clean, protective outer clothing and appropriate headgear

**Why is personal hygiene important?**

- It prevents food poisoning/contamination
- To comply with the law
- Appearance
- Staff morale

**What is a carrier?**

A person who harbours, and may pass on, harmful bacteria, even though that person may show no signs.

There is no excuse not to wash your hands - it is a legal requirement in food premises to provide separate facilities for washing hands.

**The main reason food handlers wash their hands is to protect food from biological contamination.**
When should hands be washed?

Before

- Starting work
- Handling food, especially if cooked or ready to eat, as the product will receive no further treatment to eradicate bacteria.
- Changing from one job to another, e.g. between handling money and preparing food.

And after

- Using the toilet
- Handling raw meat
- Sneezing, coughing, blowing your nose
- Touching eyes, nose, face, hair, mouths, cuts
- Smoking, coffee/lunch breaks and cleaning duties
- Handling money or waste.

Protective clothing should be worn to protect food from bacteria that may have been picked up outside of the work place. Personal clothing should be stored in a designated area away from food products as bacteria carried on clothes could contaminate the food.

Protective clothing should be?

- Bright coloured (easily identifiable if anything drops into food product)
- Comfortable
- Washable and changed frequently (personal hygiene reasons)
- Without external pockets (objects then cannot become dislodge and fall into products)
- Fastened by means of studs, Velcro or zips (buttons may become loose and fall into products)
- It should also include a suitable hat and hairnet
- And non-slip safety footwear

Food workers must not wear;

- Nail varnish – it can chip into food
- Perfume/aftershave – it can taint a food taste
- Watches and jewellery – can harbour dirt and bacteria, can also fall into food.
- Long nails - can harbour bacteria so keep nails short.

Poor personal hygiene practices

Smoking, coughing/sneezing over food, nail biting, nose picking, finger tasting.
• If a food worker has an open sore or cut, they must cover this with a bright coloured plaster - the bright colour is easier to see if it falls into food.

• Food workers must report all instances of diarrhoea, vomiting and skin infections to a supervisor before returning to work and must not work while suffering from these symptoms. The employee must receive medical clearance before returning to work.

Personal injuries –
- The skin is a natural source of infection
- Cuts which become septic contain high numbers of bacteria
- Even cuts and abrasions can be infected
- Poor food handling and hand washing habits can transfer bacteria to food and surfaces, i.e. cross-contamination.