CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY UNIT GUIDANCE SHEET – 00?

Safe Food Storage Within the Working Environment

The Issue

Many of us are aware of the need to ensure that food is stored correctly at home, however this requirement is sometimes forgotten when food is brought into the working environment.

Poor hygiene practices put you and your colleagues at risk. Harmful bacteria that can cause food poisoning can spread very easily and it is everyone responsibility to ensure that we prevent this wherever possible.

This guidance sheets provides practical advice on food preparation and storage areas that are used within the Authority's premises to prepare and store individuals own food for their own consumption e.g. storage of sandwiches for lunch within a communal fridge, or cooking using a microwave in office kitchen area. This guidance is not aimed at those areas such as staff canteens where food is prepared for others to consume.

What do I need to know?

There are four main areas of defence against the growth and spread of bacteria:

1. Ensuring food areas are clean and good standards of personal hygiene are maintained.
2. Keeping food at the right temperature.
3. Preventing cross contamination.
4. Cooking foods thoroughly.

The concerns within the communal areas used within the Authority are mainly around point 1-3.

What do I need to do?

1. Ensuring food areas are clean and good standards of personal hygiene are maintained.

    - Food contamination can happen when food is handled. It is very important that individuals wash and dry their hands thoroughly, especially before eating food and after using the toilet.

- Arrangements should be made between individuals sharing the facilities to ensure that cooking and food preparation equipment and utensils and work surfaces are cleaned thoroughly. Each individual is responsible for cleaning the facilities after using them, especially where any spills have occurred. This includes the insides of microwaves and fridges as well as worktop surfaces.

- Individuals should provide cleaning materials to clean surfaces and equipment following spillages or the preparation/ eating of food.

- Arrangements should be made between individuals using shared food storage facilities that out of date and perished items of food are removed on a periodic basis. e.g. fridges and food storage cupboards will be checked by a responsible individual every Friday afternoon and any out of date or perished foods will be removed and destroyed.

2. Keeping food at the right temperature.

- Good temperature control is essential to keep certain foods safe. Products such as prepared ready-to-eat foods, cooked foods and certain dairy products should be kept chilled. If not, harmful bacteria could grow or toxins (poisons) could form in the food and make individuals ill, if they eat them.

- Food that needs to be chilled should be kept at 8°C or below.

- Fridges should be checked to ensure that they are working correctly and that food is being stored at the correct temperature.

- Staff should report faults to line management as soon as possible and prompt action is required to correct the problem.

- When reheating food ensure that it is heated thoroughly, until piping hot throughout and in accordance with the manufacturers guidance. If using a microwave oven check the rating of the oven and alter the recommended time accordingly.

3. Preventing cross contamination.

- Cross-contamination is the transfer of bacteria from some foods to other foods. The bacteria can be transferred (a) directly - when food touches or drips onto another food or (b) indirectly - for example from hands or work surfaces to food. It is easy for cross contamination to occur, below are some steps that can be taken in order to minimise these risks:

- Ensure that all food is kept covered.
- Ensure that any raw food is kept separate from cooked foods. If they are in the same fridge the cooked foods should be kept above the raw foods.
- Ensure that you clean surfaces after preparing food.

- Ensure that dishes, cups and utensils are thoroughly cleaned. Ideally this should be done in a breakout or kitchen area, using detergent and hot water. Where these facilities are not available individuals are advised to take home dishes for washing or use the disposable type. It is not advisable to wash dishes in wash hand basins in toilet/sanitary areas.