



Keeping People Safe

CHURCH HEALTH & SAFETY TOOLKIT

FOOD SAFETY



Running a community café or soup kitchen, preparing refreshments for church events and providing tea and cakes after services are all common activities in the life of a church. Clearly, all of these involve preparing and handling food, although the extent to which this is done can vary. This can range from preparing food on the premises for large numbers of people to baking cakes at home for consumption elsewhere.

Whilst instances of food poisoning and allergic reactions are rare, these can occur when poor practices have been adopted. Obviously, food safety will be a more significant concern if you run a restaurant, café or other catering business; provide charitable support (e.g. for the homeless); or if you are an employer who has a restaurant or use outside caterers.

However, provided certain basic precautions are followed, there is no reason why you should not continue to prepare and sell food to support your church and its mission.

Legal requirements

As you would expect, there is a series of detailed laws that relate to the preparation and sale of food. These include Regulation (EC) No.852/2004 (on the hygiene of foodstuffs), the Food Safety Act 1990, and the Food Hygiene (England) Regulations (with similar requirements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

Some of these place duties on organisations covering a wide range of aspects. These range from establishing management procedures and the standards required in premises to the training and personal hygiene of those involved in food preparation. Further information is available at www.food.gov.uk/enforcement/regulation/foodlaw

Essentially, food supplied, sold or provided outside of the family or domestic setting must be safe to eat. It must not be 'injurious to health' or 'unfit for human consumption'. This is regardless of whether those supplying or selling the food are trying to make a profit.

Certain organisations supplying food must be registered as food business operators (FBOs) with the local authorities. This is again regardless of whether this is for profit or not.

If you serve or supply food directly to the public, you may also be covered by the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (or Food Hygiene Information Scheme in Scotland). This means that when your business is inspected, you will be given a hygiene rating, based on the standards found at the time. You will be given a sticker/certificate with your rating or result to display publicly. Customers can also look these up on the Food Standards Agency's website.

Further information about the schemes are available at www.food.gov.uk/ratings

The extent to which all of these requirements will apply to you depends upon your particular circumstances. They certainly will if you run a food business. However, where somebody handles, prepares, stores or serves food occasionally and on a small scale (e.g. a church, village fair or other situations where volunteers prepare food occasionally), they may not. This can be a confusing area of the law and further information is available at <https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/providing-food-at-community-and-charity-events>

Hazards to look out for

Some of the typical hazards include:

- Dirty or damaged work surfaces and stores in food preparation areas
- Storage and preparation of raw and cooked foods together
- Signs of pests in areas where food may be prepared or stored
- Food that is out of date, of poor quality or contaminated
- Inadequate cooking, re-heating or thawing
- Cleaning chemicals stored with foodstuffs
- Food being prepared too far in advance
- Foods containing known allergens
- Storing foods at the wrong temperature
- People who are ill handling food
- Contamination from foreign bodies (e.g. hair, jewellery etc.)
- Poor personal hygiene*.

*Note: this list is not exhaustive

Precautions you can take

Typical precautions include:

- Keeping premises clean, well maintained and in good condition – including walls, equipment, ceilings and floors
- Ensuring food preparation surfaces are in good condition, being easy to clean and disinfect
- Purchasing food from reputable suppliers
- Checking deliveries to ensure food is supplied packaged safely, at the correct temperature, in date and is clean and undamaged
- Having appropriate stock control procedures
- Checking the temperature of any chilling equipment at least once a day
- Storing raw and ready-to-eat food properly e.g. if they are in the same fridge, raw meat/poultry/fish should always be stored below ready-to-eat food in a clearly distinguishable part of the fridge and in covered containers
- Making sure that food is cooked and prepared properly
- Keeping food covered to help protect it from bacteria and to prevent contamination
- Adopting good hygiene practices when preparing food, particularly if those involved are sick
- Training food handlers in food hygiene
- Disposing of packaging materials and food waste properly
- Pest-proofing your premises
- Providing suitable washing facilities (i.e. wash hand basins, hot water, soap, disposable hand towels etc.)
- Having a dedicated area for storing cleaning chemicals, away from foodstuffs*

*Note: this list is not exhaustive

Making a start

Action

1. Decide what steps you need to take to comply with the law.

This will depend on the nature of the food preparation activity you are involved in.

2. Implement suitable precautions to ensure that any food prepared is safe

Guidance

In many instances, you may not be required to do much more than follow good hygiene practices. However, where you prepare food regularly for others and this requires a degree of organisation – you may have to do more.

Useful information, guidance and resources are available at www.food.gov.uk/. It is not always clear whether community and charity food supply, which is often occasional or small-scale in nature, requires registration. Guidance on this can be found at www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/providing-food-at-community-and-charity-events.

If you intend to run a restaurant, café or other catering businesses such as a shop selling food, you may have to register your premises with the local authority (for new business premises, this must be at least 28 days before opening) and make sure that the information they have remains up-to-date by notifying them of any significant changes.

If you cannot decide what steps to take or whether you should be registered, contact your local authority environmental health department food safety team, who will be able to advise you.

Where you prepare food regularly for others and this requires a degree of organisation, you may need to consider a range of precautions. Obviously, the extent you will need to implement these will depend upon your own particular circumstances. They could include making sure that:

- Premises are suitable, properly maintained, clean and disinfected
- There is no risk of contamination
- food is properly handling and stored at appropriate temperatures
- Adequate staff welfare facilities are provided (e.g. hand washing, toilet facilities, changing facilities etc.)
- Specific precautions are based on the principles of HACCP (i.e. hazard analysis critical control point) with these being implemented where necessary

Continued overleaf

Making a start

Action

3. Document your arrangements and responsibilities for food preparation.

Guidance

- Procedures are developed to deal with any outbreak of food poisoning, foreign body contamination incident or complaint
- Required information is provided in relation to food allergies. Further guidance and advice is available at www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-industry
- Adequate training and information for food handlers, supervisors etc. is provided
- Suitable records are completed and retained. These could include those relating to temperature control, maintenance, inspections, as well as those relating to any information or training provided to employees and others.

Record the arrangements and responsibilities for managing food safety, reviewing these where necessary.

If you have prepared a health and safety policy, you could record these as part of it.

You can use our Church Health and Safety Policy template if you haven't done this and need one to comply with health and safety law.

Want to know more?

Other useful health and safety information is available at www.ecclesiastical.com/healthandsafety

Further guidance and resources are also available from the Food Standards Agency at: www.food.gov.uk/

Note: if you are in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man, then regional variations might apply. In this instance, you should check the guidance provided by the Enforcing Agency for your region. This will be freely available on their website.

Need to contact us?

If you would like to speak to someone about health and safety in churches you can either:

Call our Risk Management Advice Line on 0345 600 7531
(Monday to Friday, 09.00 to 17.00 - excluding Bank Holidays)

Or email us at risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com

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