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Infected food handlers

Occupational
aspects of
management

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aspects of
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Evidence-based guidance for
employees



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This leaflet summarises the findings of a review of current evidence and is intended to help you in your responsibility to prevent the spread of infection from yourself to food.*

Definition of a food handler

You are classified as a food handler if you fall into either of the following categories:

- you are employed directly in the production and preparation of foodstuffs, in the manufacturing, catering and retail industries; or
- you undertake maintenance or repair of equipment in food handling areas.

Food handling involves all aspects of treating and storing food from receipt of raw materials to the delivery of the final prepared product.

Key findings of the evidence review

Thorough hand washing with soap and drying hands with either a paper towel or a hot air dryer is an effective method of preventing the spread of infection.

* NHS Plus, Royal College of Physicians, Faculty of Occupational Medicine. *Infected food handlers: occupational aspects of management. A national guideline*. London: RCP, 2008.

You may be infected or infectious without having symptoms.

Outbreaks of food-borne disease have been caused by infections from food handlers who have worked while unwell.

Symptoms

Symptoms of infection, which could be transmitted to food, include:

- diarrhoea (with or without blood)
- abdominal cramps or pain
- nausea
- vomiting
- fever.

Your responsibilities

You need to be aware that you are responsible for reporting infectious or potentially infectious conditions to your line manager.

You should inform your manager and leave the food handling area immediately if suffering with vomiting or diarrhoea. You may be allowed to work in non-food handling areas for a limited period, at the discretion of your manager.

You should inform your manager and your occupational health department if there are any changes to your health during your employment.

If you develop diarrhoea, vomiting or fever you should refrain from work for 48 hours after symptoms subside and seek advice from your occupational health department or family doctor before returning to work.

You should ask your manager to instruct you about good hand-washing techniques. Before handling food, you must always wash your hands with soap and dry them with either a paper towel or a hot air dryer.

You must ensure that your finger nails are short enough to be effectively cleaned.

You need to be aware that you are at increased risk of transmitting infection if you change nappies at home or at work. Therefore, if you both prepare food and change nappies you need to pay particular attention to regular hand washing with good technique.

Advice on wearing rings, dental care and nail varnish has not been included in this leaflet. However, management may wish to address these and other issues to ensure quality control in production.