

Food Safety Standards – Food handling skills & knowledge

Chapter 3 (Australia only) Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code

NOTE: The Food Safety Standards do not apply in New Zealand. The provisions of the food standards treaty between Australia and New Zealand do not include food hygiene standards.

Under Standard 3.2.2 Food Safety Practices and General Requirements, the owners of food businesses are responsible for making sure that people who handle food or food contact surfaces in their business, and the people who supervise this work, have the skills and knowledge they need to handle food safely.

The only exception to this requirement is for charitable or community fundraising events, which sell food that is not potentially hazardous or that will be properly cooked and then eaten straightaway.

The skills and knowledge requirement was included in the standard to ensure that staff handle food correctly and that it remains safe to eat.

What do ‘skills’ and ‘knowledge’ mean for your business?

Skill: Your staff and their supervisors must be able to do their work in ways that ensure that your business produces safe food.

Knowledge: Your staff and their supervisors must know about issues associated with food safety and safe food handling practices that are relevant to your business and the jobs they do for you.

What do staff and supervisors have to know?

Food handlers must have the skills and knowledge that they need to handle food safely as they carry out the work that they are responsible for. They do not need skills and knowledge for other jobs in the business. For example, in a catering business, someone who makes sandwiches will need skills and knowledge that are quite different from the skills and knowledge needed by someone who does the cleaning for the business.

However, if some staff help with other work when people are away, or sometimes supervise other food handlers, then they must also have the skills and knowledge for this other work, as well as the skills and knowledge to do their regular work.

Staff skills and knowledge must include food safety and food hygiene matters. Food safety issues cover what staff must do to food to keep food safe. Food hygiene practices cover what staff must do to keep things clean so they do not contaminate food. The following example shows the difference between food safety issues and food hygiene practices.

A food handler in a shop prepares, stuffs and cooks whole chickens. The staff member who does this work must have appropriate food safety and food hygiene knowledge and skills to make sure that the chicken is prepared safely for sale.

The food safety skills and knowledge needed for this job include:

- knowing that raw chickens are likely to be contaminated with dangerous bacteria and that eating undercooked chicken can cause food poisoning;
- knowing the cooking time and temperature needed to make sure that the chicken and the stuffing are thoroughly cooked;
- the skill needed to check the chicken to make sure it is thoroughly cooked;
- knowing the correct storage temperatures for both raw and cooked chickens; and
- the skills needed to make sure that equipment is set at the right temperature.

The *food hygiene* skills and knowledge needed for this job include:

- knowing that hands, gloves or the equipment used to handle raw chickens can contaminate cooked chickens;
- the skill to wash hands and equipment in ways that reduce the potential for contamination;
- knowing about other things that could contaminate the cooked chickens, such as dirty clothes or dirty work benches; and
- the skills needed to keep the work area clean.

How do I make sure that staff have appropriate skills and knowledge?

Formal training is not required. There are many different things you can do and factors you can take into account to ensure that staff have the skills and knowledge they need for their work. Some examples are:

- 'in house' training by other staff or the owner of the business;
- giving staff food safety and food hygiene information for them to read;
- operating rules that set out the responsibilities of food handlers and their supervisors;
- sending staff to food safety courses run by other people;
- hiring a consultant to run a course for the staff of the business; and
- recruiting staff with formal industry based training qualifications.

Businesses can choose the approach that best suits their business, provided they can be confident that their staff have the skills and knowledge needed for the work they do.

How can I comply with the skills and knowledge requirement?

Businesses may find the following questions useful when considering the requirement regarding food handling skills and knowledge.

Have you identified the food handling and safety risks in your business?

What food handling tasks do different staff members carry out?

Have staff been told or shown how to handle food safely within your business?

Is someone responsible for making sure any set procedures or rules are followed?

Do you have the equipment and space that staff need to keep work areas clean?

Businesses which ensure that their food handlers have safe food handling skills and knowledge, who supervise the work of their staff, and who regularly remind them about safe food handling practices, should find it easy to comply with the skills and knowledge requirement.

Need more information?

Copies of the standards, the guides to these and other fact sheets and supporting material can be found on the FSANZ website (<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/>). Food businesses may also seek advice directly from the Environmental Health Officers at their local council, or from their State or Territory health or health services department and Public Health Units. Information can also be accessed through the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing <http://www.health.gov.au/> .

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