GUIDANCE ON FOOD HYGIENE AND INFECTION CONTROL
FOR CHILDMINDERS

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that there are about four times as many incidents of food poisoning resulting from food prepared in the home than there are from food prepared in commercial premises such as restaurants, hotels and takeaways.

Anyone who has suffered from food poisoning will tell you, it’s not a pleasant experience. At best it may mean spending a few days in bed with symptoms such as diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach cramps, fever, headaches and nausea. At worst food poisoning can be fatal.

It is the responsibility of every food business to make sure that the food they provide is fit to eat.

What you may not realise is that, as a registered childminder, if you provide food for the children you look after you are running a food business.

This means you are required to comply with the requirements of Food safety law. Food Safety Enforcement Officers from the local Council may, at any reasonable time (with at least 24 hours notice), inspect the parts of your house used to store or prepare food.

This booklet is designed to help you comply with the law, and more importantly, take the necessary steps to ensure the food you serve is safe to eat.

Please note: This booklet is provided for information only and should not be regarded as a statement of the law.

BUYING FOOD

- Always buy food from reputable suppliers.
- Always check ‘use-by’ and ‘best before’ dates on packaging to ensure food has sufficient ‘life’ up until you intend to use it.
- In warm weather use a cool box or cool bag to carry home high-risk foods (foods that need refrigeration)
- Use ice packs in the cool box/bag to help keep food cool.
- Make sure raw food and foods that are ready-to-eat, are properly wrapped in shopping bags, Wherever possible put them in separate bags.
- Try to buy chilled and frozen foods last.
• After buying chilled or frozen foods take it home without delay and place it in the fridge or freezer as soon as you arrive.

**STORING FOOD**

• Store raw meat and poultry in covered containers at the bottom of the fridge to avoid any risk of juices dripping on to foods that are ready to eat.

• Always keep eggs in the fridge.

• Do not store opened cans of food in the fridge. Put the contents into a suitable containers such as a covered plastic bowl before refrigerating.

• Regularly check your fridge to make sure it is working properly (0°C to 5°C). A simple thermometer kept in the fridge will make this easier.

• Defrost the fridge regularly.

• Never overload your fridge. They work best when air can circulate around the food.

• Remember fridges only slow down the growth of harmful germs – **they do not kill them!**

• Never leave the fridge door open longer than necessary.

• Wash fridges down with hot soapy water followed by a disinfectant cleaner. Rinse and allow to dry before replacing the food.

• Keep all stored food covered to stop it being contaminated and to prevent insects and other pests getting in.

• Regularly clean out food cupboards as spillages can harbour germs.

• Clean and disinfect bread bins regularly to help prevent mould growth.

**PREPARING FOOD**

• Always wash your hands thoroughly before preparing food. A bacterial soap is recommended.

• Regularly clean and disinfect work surfaces and equipment. A disinfectant cleaner will help kill germs and prevent cross-contamination.

• Clean work surfaces and spillages as you go.

• Prepare raw and ready-to-eat foods separately.
- Wherever possible use different chopping boards and knives to keep raw foods such as meat and poultry separate from ready-to-eat foods separately.

- Thoroughly defrost meat, poultry and fish before cooking.

- Keep pets out of the kitchen - they carry disease.

- Do not use foods after their ‘use by’ date.

**COOKING FOOD**

- Make sure food is cooked thoroughly until it is piping hot right through to the middle. Burgers, sausages, etc. should be cooked until the juices run clear and there are no pink bits inside.

- Always follow cooking instructions on packaging carefully.

- Never dip your fingers in food to taste. Always use a clean spoon.

- If you do have to re-heat food (e.g. food prepared by the child’s parent), allow yourself plenty of time to thoroughly heat the food until it is piping hot, then let it cool for a few minutes so that it won’t scald the child. Never just warm the food through.

**GENERAL ADVICE**

- Where possible try to prepare food for immediate consumption.

- Food that is to be eaten cold should be cooled as quickly as possible after cooking (within 1½ hours of re-heating).

- Never serve food containing raw eggs, e.g. home-made mayonnaise.

- Dish-cloths can carry millions of germs which can then be spread around the kitchen when the cloth is used. You should soak dish-cloths regularly in a bleach solution, then rinse and dry thoroughly.

- Always wash your hands before preparing food, after handling pets and visiting the toilet.

- Never dry your hands on tea towels - use separate hand towels.

- Cuts and burns should be covered with waterproof dressings.

- Raw vegetables and meat both carry harmful germs and both are often cleaned and prepared in and around the sink. It is therefore important that the sink and surrounding area are cleaned regularly with disinfectant.
• Food allergy and food intolerance are both types of food sensitivity. When someone has a food allergy, their immune system reacts to a particular food as if it isn’t safe. If someone has a severe food allergy, this can cause a life-threatening reaction.

• Food intolerance doesn’t involve the immune system and is generally not life-threatening. But if someone eats a food that they are intolerant to, this could make them ill or affect their long-term health.

• In theory, any food can cause a food allergy. But in fact just a handful of foods as to blame for 90% of allergic reactions to food in the UK. These foods are known as the ‘big eight’. They are: milk, eggs, peanuts (groundnuts or monkey nuts), nuts (including Brazil nuts, hazelnuts, almonds and walnuts), fish, shellfish (including mussels, crab and shrimps), soya and wheat.

• It is essential to look carefully at the label on any pre-packed food you buy if you have a food allergy or intolerance yourself, or if you are buying food for someone who does. Even if you gave bought the product before, you should still check the label. The recipe might have changed.

• As well as the ingredients list, many food products have a statement or an allergy advice box on the label saying that they contain a certain food, for example nuts, milk or eggs. Some manufacturers use symbols to show this.

• Food labelling rules require pre-packed food sold in the UK or the rest of the European Union (EU) to show clearly on the label if it contains one of the following (or if one of it’s ingredients contains, or is made from, one of these): peanuts; nuts such as almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, Brazil nuts, cashews, pecans, pistachios and macadamia nuts; eggs; milk; crustaceans (including prawns, crabs and lobsters); fish; sesame seeds; cereals containing gluten (including wheat, rye, barley and oats); soya; celery; mustard; sulphur dioxide and sulphates (preservatives used in some foods and drinks) at levels above 10mg per kg or per litre.

• The new rules should make it easier for people to avoid the above foods in pre-packed food products, including alcoholic drinks. However, some people are sensitive to foods that are not on this list, so always check the ingredients carefully.

INFECTION CONTROL

Food poisoning and other infectious illnesses can take many forms and be caused by several different kinds of germs. It is vital that if you, or any of the children you are responsible for, develop food poisoning- like symptoms you know what action to take.

Food poisoning symptoms include: diarrhoea, stomach cramps, fever, nausea, headaches

When children are ill:

• Seek medical advice – this is particularly important in the case of young children.
• Sick children should be kept at home until a 48 hour period had past during which there have been no symptoms.
- Clean and disinfect soiling accidents on floors and other hard surfaces.
- Wash hands thoroughly after taking children to the toilet and after changing nappies.
- Toilets and potties should be disinfected after use.
- Wear disposable gloves and aprons when cleaning up.

When you are ill:

- Do not try to look after children if you are ill with the above symptoms.
- Do not prepare food until at least 48 hours after the symptoms have stopped.

If you are in any doubt seek medical advice or contact your local Environmental Health Service.

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The law requires that food handlers receive supervision, instruction and/or training to a level that is suitable for the job they do.

You must, at the very least, be aware and understand the principles of food hygiene and the safe handling of food.

Many childminders have found attending short basic food hygiene courses run by education establishments and private training companies have helped them get a clearer understanding of food handling practices. Such courses have the added advantage of giving you the opportunity to ask questions on things you are not sure about. You will also receive a certificate on successful completion of the course. Contact Sandwell’s Environmental Health Team for further details:

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