

Food handler skills and knowledge

Food handlers require skills and knowledge

All food handlers need to know how the work they do can affect the safety of the food.

Australian Food Safety Standard 3.2.2 (*Food Safety Practices and General Requirements*) requires that people who handle food and the people who supervise them have the skills and knowledge in food safety and food hygiene for the work they do.

People who handle food means anyone who is involved in any activity that involves food, or surfaces likely to come in contact with food. This means people involved in food:

- manufacturing;
- processing;
- preparing—such as chopping, cooking, thawing;
- delivering and transporting;
- packing; and
- people who clean tableware and equipment that comes in contact with food.

Food handlers need the skills and knowledge required to keep food safe for the jobs they carry out in the business. They do not need skills and knowledge for all of the jobs in the business. For example, a cook will need skills and knowledge in food safety and food hygiene that are quite different from those needed by a waitress or a dish-washer.

If food handlers do different work from time to time, such as taking over the duties of other food handlers when they are away, or if they supervise other food handlers, then they must also have the skills and knowledge needed for this work.

There are two broad categories of skills and knowledge required by food handlers:

1 General Practices

- Personal hygiene practices that all food handlers preparing food know and put into practice;
- Food handling practices to prepare and store food correctly; and
- Hygiene practices to ensure the food premises and equipment are clean and well maintained.

2 Specific Practices

- Skills and knowledge needed for more specific food handling operations, such as receiving food into the premises, cooking, reheating, cooling and disposal of food.

Food handler training

Food handlers **do not** have to attend food safety training courses to meet the skills and knowledge requirements. There are many approaches to training that a food business can adopt such as on-the-job training, recognising prior experience or attending a training course may all be appropriate.

A food business might decide that formal training is the best approach, especially where the skills and knowledge required are more complex. This may be most appropriate in the manufacturing sector or in a hospital.

Responsibilities of food businesses

It is **good practice** for food businesses to ensure that before anyone is allowed to start work as a food handler, they should at least receive oral or written instruction in the essentials of food hygiene. Staff need to know their food safety responsibilities.

Food businesses need to manage food safety by ensuring that staff:

- Can locate and follow workplace information about their own food handling operations;
- Can identify and correct (or report) situations or procedures that do not meet your business's agreed workplace practices; and
- Know their responsibilities in regard to health and hygiene requirements.

Skills, knowledge, food safety and hygiene

A **skill** is being able to do something. It means that food handlers and their supervisors are able to **do** the things in their work that keep food safe.

Knowledge is knowing about or understanding something. It means that food handlers and their supervisors know what must be done to keep food safe.

Food safety is ensuring that food is safe to eat.

Food hygiene is keeping food premises and equipment clean.

Personal hygiene is ensuring the food handler is clean and wears clean clothing.

More information

The Department of Human Services Food Safety Unit has a range of resources on safe food handling practices available on available from the website www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety or by contacting 1300 364 352.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) document '**Food Safety: Guidance on skills and knowledge for food businesses—Advice for food businesses on the skills and knowledge requirement of Food Safety Standard 3.2.2**' available from the website www.foodstandards.gov.au

Local councils can also provide information about food handler skills and knowledge required to comply with Australian food standards.

The National Training Information Service provides information on food safety competencies, industry training packages and registered training organisations on the website www.ntis.gov.au