

Food Alert

Top mistakes you could be making in your EHO inspections



Getting that 5/5 food hygiene rating is a substantial stamp of approval in the food industry – and it's more important than ever now, as many more customers are choosing where to eat based on their food hygiene rating. Research by Food Alert and KAM Media shows that 63% of consumers say it's an important part of their decision-making process, so it needs to be an equally important part of your business strategy.

There's a few common mistakes that crop up when it comes to Environmental Health inspections – so we've put a few together in this guide with some tips on avoiding them.



Inadequate separation of raw and ready to eat foods

Preventing cross-contamination is fundamental in making food safe to eat. It might sound simple, but there are a lot of places cross-contamination can occur, like food delivery, storage and preparation. Here's a few easy ways to prevent cross-contamination.

- ✓ When you get food delivered, check that it's been packed properly to prevent cross-contamination, and if it hasn't you should notify your supplier.
- ✓ Put raw meat and dirty vegetables on the bottom shelves of the fridge and ready-to-eat food at the top. Remember that eggs are classed as raw meat.
- ✓ If you can, having separate fridges and freezers for raw meat and ready-to-eat food is a great way to avoid cross-contamination.
- ✓ Have separate preparation areas for raw meat and ready-to-eat food – and it's important to think about avoiding allergen cross-contamination. Most kitchens have different coloured knives and chopping boards for different types of food, but make sure you store your colour-coded chopping boards in a rack, rather than stacking them on top of one another.
- ✓ Thoroughly clean and disinfect surfaces after every use.
- ✓ Check what's being stored under food preparation surfaces – EHOs frequently find containers used for ready-to-eat food underneath areas where raw meat is prepared.



Inadequate personal hygiene

EHOs often find that people preparing food wear their own outdoor clothes throughout the day – which could have all sorts on! Check out our top tips for making sure your people aren't a contamination risk.

- ✔ Make sure food handlers have clean clothes they only wear at work for food handling.
- ✔ Provide disposable aprons and gloves to protect their clothes when handling raw meat or certain allergens, or doing dirty jobs like emptying bins or deep cleaning.
- ✔ Make sure your food handlers know how to wash their hands properly, as it's easy for EHOs to spot where handwashing isn't being taken seriously. You'll need enough liquid hand soap and a method of drying hands hygienically – e.g. disposable paper towels. Remember when wearing gloves that hand washing rules still apply!
- ✔ Make sure food handlers aren't wearing things like false nails or jewellery when they're preparing food.

Inadequate disinfecting

Food preparation surfaces and equipment has to be protected from contamination and disinfected properly. You should have a dishwasher that can properly kill bacteria on equipment, but if you don't due to resource or space, you should only use certain equipment for certain foods, and store them separately. A common mistake is stacking chopping boards rather than using a rack which could cause boards used for red meat to come into contact with boards used for dairy, for example.

Here's a few questions an EHO might ask about your disinfection processes:

- ✔ Do you know how your disinfectant needs to be prepared? E.g. does it need diluting, and do all your staff know how to do this properly?
- ✔ Does everyone know how to use the product properly i.e. how long it needs to be left on the surface to be effective (contact time)?
- ✔ Does everyone know how to do a two-stage clean and disinfect?

Inadequate pest control

Pest problems will cause issues for you when an EHO comes knocking. There are always two common reasons for pest issues – you're not cleaning properly or you haven't pest-proofed properly. It's easy for pests to find quiet places to hide in commercial kitchens, and they'll be able to find a water source easily. You can however control access to a food source.

- ✔ Pay as much attention to low-level cleaning as you do to cleaning your surfaces and other areas.
- ✔ Don't allow food, oil or fat in places accessible to pests – underneath and inside hobs, cooking ranges and fryers are prime examples.
- ✔ Be careful with oil or grease spills and store food in pest-proof containers.

If you can pest-proof your premises, do so! It's a great investment and it's the best way of preventing a pest problem.



Inadequate food safety management systems

Not only do you need to have a proper documented food safety management system in place, but it needs to be championed by everyone at your business too. An EHO will know if your temperature checks aren't being done regularly, your cleaning records are wrong or your delivery checks aren't happening.

- ✔ Your food safety management system needs to detail how you make sure your food is safe, including the risks and problems you could encounter and what to do if you do encounter them.
- ✔ All your food handlers need to know where to find the system, how to use it and keeps it a priority.
- ✔ Make sure all your food handlers have proper training and you've got this recorded.

You also need to demonstrate confidence in management at an EHO inspection. As a manager or owner of a food business, you should document when things go wrong and what you've done to fix it.

Inadequate temperature controls

It's really important that fridge temperatures are checked frequently to make sure there's no danger of bacteria growing. The EHO will do their own checks on the fridges so you need to be prepared for this. Often, digital displays on the outside of fridges aren't accurate so make sure you have your own thermometers inside the fridge.

One key item of equipment that every kitchen must have is a probe thermometer. Without one you can't prove to your EHO that foods are being adequately cooked, cooled or reheated.

We're here to take some of the stress away...

EHO inspections can be daunting – especially as a lot of the time, you won't know they're coming. That means you need to be on top of your safety procedures at all times. But running a compliant premises isn't just a legal requirement, it's great for your business too. With us by your side, you can get your food safety management, temperature checks, training and more under control – all with the help of our food industry experts.

Want the backing of our team?

Just call **020 7244 1900** and let's discuss your compliance needs. Or **get in touch online** and we'll call you back at a time that suits you best.