

Cleaning and sanitising for food businesses

What are my legal requirements?

Clause 20, 3.2.2 of the Food Standards Code; requires all food businesses to maintain food contact surfaces, equipment and utensils in a clean and sanitary condition. All food contact surfaces must be clean and have heat and/or chemicals applied to it. This reduces the number of microorganisms to a level which does not compromise food safety and minimises the risk of foodborne illnesses.

What is the difference between cleaning and sanitising?

Cleaning is the process of removing grease, dirt, grime and food particles from the surface of an item, by a process such as scrubbing with detergent and water. Cleaning does not destroy all harmful bacteria such as *Salmonella* or *Campylobacter*. In comparison, sanitising is the process of reducing bacteria on surfaces to a safe level. Sanitising must be undertaken after cleaning to ensure harmful bacteria are destroyed.

What do I use to sanitise?

There are two methods of sanitising; chemical and heat. Food grade sanitisers are chemicals that are designed to destroy bacteria which cause food poisoning and are safe for food contact surfaces when used according to the manufacturer's instructions. You must ensure that any chemical sanitiser used is "Food Grade" or "Food Safe", as specified by the labelling or Safety Data Sheet. Heat sanitising is the application of heat to a surface at a temperature hot enough to destroy bacteria.

Common types of sanitisers include:

1. Quaternary Ammonium Compounds (QUAT) based sanitisers

QUAT based sanitisers are widely used on food contact surfaces as they are effective against a wide variety of microorganisms, odourless and non-corrosive.

2. Chlorine-based sanitisers

Chlorine-based sanitisers are strong germicides that can kill a wide variety of microbes. Chlorine-based products break down quickly and must be made up every 24 hours to ensure effectiveness.

3. Heat

Heat is also an effective method of sanitising equipment and utensils. The most common method of heat sanitising is via a commercial dishwashing machine. Manufacturer's installation and service instructions need to be followed, and routine checks undertaken, to ensure adequate sanitising temperature is maintained. If immersing equipment or utensils in hot water; the water temperature must be held at at-least 77°C degrees with a minimum contact time of 30 seconds. If using a domestic dishwasher; the longest hottest cycle must be used, it must be noted that domestic dishwashers are generally not suitable for food businesses.



Can I use bleach?

Bleach is a common cleaning product available at most supermarkets. Only plain unscented bleach should be used as a sanitiser. Most bleaches range from 4% to 10% chlorine (active ingredient) and require different dilutions and water temperatures. Diluted bleach solutions are required to be made up every 24 hours, as the chemical breaks down and becomes ineffective over time. Recommended surface contact time is 10 minutes, the bleach solution must then be rinsed off with potable water. For the above reasons bleach is not recommended as a first-choice sanitiser for food contact surfaces.

Alternatives?

Alternatives such as multipurpose cleaner, lemon juice, oils, vinegar, disinfectant aerosols, alcohol cleaners or hand sanitisers cannot be used for sanitising food contact surfaces. Lemon juice and vinegar are weak acids and are ineffective. Alcohol cleaners are not recommended for large areas as they may make surfaces flammable. Multipurpose cleaner and surface sprays are ineffective for sanitising, as a safe reduction of food poisoning bacteria has not been scientifically demonstrated.

How to sanitise?

When utilising a chemical sanitiser, it is common to use a double/triple bowl sink, with this method:

1. **Rinse** (rinse off visible matter from all surfaces)
2. **Clean** (with warm water and detergent, physically remove all visible matter from surfaces)
3. **Rinse** (rinse off the detergent)
4. **Sanitise** (use sanitiser diluted to the correct concentration – see manufacturer's instructions)
5. **Rinse** (if required by sanitiser manufacturer's instructions)
6. **Dry** (air dry is preferable, or alternatively with a clean tea towel)

When do I need to sanitise?

Surfaces must be cleaned and rinsed before beginning sanitisation. All food-contact surfaces must be washed, rinsed and sanitised in the following situations:

- Before/after each use.
- Any time you begin working with another type of food. (e.g. raw meat to salad).
- Any time you are interrupted during a task and the tools or items you have been working with may have been contaminated.
- At four-hour intervals, if the items are in constant use (e.g. juicers, blenders, meat slicers).

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