

## The Issue – SANITISING FOOD CONTACT AREAS

Some food businesses are unclear about what to sanitise and how to do it. Inadequate sanitising of food contact surfaces may allow harmful bacteria to survive and contaminate food.

### Background

Clause 20 of the Food Safety Standard 3.2.2 requires food businesses to ensure the following are clean and sanitised:

- a) Eating and drinking utensils; and
- b) Food contact surfaces and equipment – any surface that food will come into contact with.

### What is the difference between cleaning and sanitising?

Cleaning means the removal of visible dirt or residual food matter. It may leave behind bacteria that are too small to be seen. Sanitising is using heat or chemicals to destroy any dangerous bacteria that remain after cleaning.

### What needs to be sanitised?

- Eating and drinking utensils such as glasses, cups, plates and cutlery;
- Food contact surfaces such as cutting boards and knives used for ready-to-eat foods;
- Equipment such as mixers; and
- Benches and sinks.

### Methods of sanitising

There are 2 methods of sanitising:

1. Using hot water; or
2. Using chemicals.

## 1. USING HOT WATER

### Manual sanitation using hot water

The water has to be hot and at a minimum of 77°C for at least 30 seconds – due to risk of scalding this is only recommended for use with specialised equipment such as dishwashers.

### Sanitising using a dishwasher

Dishwashers are an effective means of using hot water to sanitise eating and drinking utensils and other heat resistant equipment such as cutting boards, knives and metal mixer bowls.

Commercial dishwashers use high water temperatures for a relatively short time.

Domestic dishwashers use a lower temperature but their long cycle times can allow for effective sanitation. 'Low' or 'economy' settings are not acceptable, as they don't reach a temperature

of 65°C. If unsure whether your domestic dishwasher can achieve 65°C, refer to the operating manual or contact the manufacturer.

## 2. USING CHEMICALS

### Commercial sanitisers

The most commonly used sanitisers in food businesses have either chlorine or QATs (quaternary ammonium compounds) as active ingredients. Most suppliers of sanitisers tend to recommend QATs because they have a longer shelf life than most chlorine sanitisers, less odour and unlike chlorine, are not corrosive on most metal surfaces.

Suppliers and your Environmental Health Officer can provide advice on:

- Suitability of a sanitiser for use in a food business;
- The correct concentration to use;
- Contact time (important – don't overlook this); and
- Whether it needs to be rinsed off. Use of a no-rinse sanitiser can save time and water if the sanitiser is used according to the manufacturer's instructions.

### Combined detergent/sanitisers

Specially designed combined detergent/sanitisers, carefully used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, may be appropriate for some small businesses with limited sanitation requirements and a single bowl sink. These products should be effective on lightly soiled surfaces with no protein or fat residues. Check with your Environmental Health Officer to see if this type is appropriate for your business.

### Bleach as a sanitiser

Small businesses with straightforward sanitising requirements can use normal bleach, which can readily be purchased from supermarkets. Again, check with your Environmental Health Officer to see if this is appropriate for your business. Bleaches

generally range from 4% to 10% chlorine as indicated on the label. Plain bleach only should be used. Scented bleaches (i.e. with added 'lemon scent' etc.) are not acceptable. To make up 10 litres (about a standard sized bucket or sink), refer to the following table:

Amount of bleach to add to 10L warm water – sanitise for 10 minutes	
Using household bleach (4% Chlorine)	Using 'Hospital' bleach (10% Chlorine)
25 mL	10 mL

### Non-preferred alternatives

Methylated spirits is not recommended as a sanitiser for food contact surfaces as it will leave chemical residues which may taint food rendering it unsuitable.

Citrus based cleaners are not proven to have a sanitising effect and should be used as cleaning agents only.

Vinegar and lemon juice are not recommended for commercial situations in the absence of evidence that they are consistently effective.

### How to sanitise using a chemical sanitiser and a double bowl sink

Best practice involves up to four 'wet' steps using a double bowl sink by one of two methods. Method 1 requires use of a container for the sanitiser; Method 2 involves emptying and refilling one of the sinks.

#### METHOD 1

1. Set up a clean plastic tub or bucket containing sanitiser at the correct concentration on a bench or draining board;
2. Wash utensils and equipment in the first sink using warm water and detergent;
3. Rinse in clean water in the second sink;
4. Place into the tub of sanitising solution for the required time;
5. Rinse again (unless a 'no rinse' sanitiser is used) in the second sink; and
6. Drain dry or dry with a clean tea towel (replaced frequently).

#### METHOD 2

1. Wash utensils and equipment in warm water and detergent in the first sink;
2. Rinse in clean water in the second sink;
3. Empty to the first sink, clean, and refill with sanitiser at the correct concentration;
4. Place into the sink of sanitising solution for the required time;
5. Rinse again (depending on the sanitiser) in the second sink; and
6. Air dry or dry with a clean tea towel (replaced frequently).

### Sanitising with a spray bottle

A spray bottle of sanitiser can be used for bench tops or equipment not suitable for washing in a sink or dishwasher. A spray bottle can also be used for single tasks such as sanitising a cutting board.

Before using the spray, ensure the surface to be sanitised is properly cleaned and thoroughly rinsed. Apply the spray and allow sufficient time for the sanitiser to work (see manufacturer's instructions) and wipe off with a clean sponge or cloth. The cloth used to wipe off the sanitiser must be clean and replaced frequently to ensure it does not recontaminate the surface.

### Further advice

For a list of manufacturers and suppliers of chemical sanitisers, look under 'Cleaning Products &/or Supplies' in the Yellow Pages. If you have any questions about sanitising or safe food handling, please contact an Eastern Health Authority Environmental Health Officer on 8132-3600 or [eha@eha.sa.gov.au](mailto:eha@eha.sa.gov.au).