

Fitness to work

This advice applies to all UK food business operators other than primary producers (for example, farmers and growers).

People who work around open food while suffering from certain infections (mainly bacteria and viruses like salmonella or norovirus) can contaminate food, water or surfaces.

This can result in the spread of infection to other staff and customers who go on to consume contaminated food or have contact with contaminated surfaces.

Food business operator responsibility

All references to legislation should be read as either EU law in Northern Ireland (NI) or assimilated law in England and Wales, as applicable.

It's the responsibility of the food business operator (FBO) to ensure they follow the requirements in Regulation (EC) 853/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs Annex 1 4 (e).

- to ensure that staff handling foodstuffs are in good health and undergo training on health risks;

Chapter VIII (2)

- No person suffering from, or being a carrier of a disease likely to be transmitted through food or afflicted, for example, with infected wounds, skin infections, sores or diarrhoea is to be permitted to handle food or enter any food-handling area in any capacity if there is any likelihood of direct or indirect contamination. Any person so affected and employed in a food business and who is likely to come into contact with food is to report immediately the illness or symptoms, and if possible, their causes, to the food business operator.?

Our [general food law page](#) offers more information on these regulations.

Diarrhoea and/or vomiting are the main symptoms of illnesses that can be transmitted through food.

Managers must exclude staff with these symptoms from working with or around open food, normally for 48 hours from when symptoms stop naturally.

Penalising staff for being ill, for example by not paying them when they are excluded from work, could lead to them working whilst ill and may lead to food safety problems. Incentives to take fewer sick days can have a similar effect. [Statutory sick pay](#) is available in many cases, although usually requires a certificate from a GP.

Staff excluded for longer periods because of more serious infectious diseases may also be able to receive financial support from their local authority.

Food handler responsibility

Staff handling food or working in a food handling area must:

1. Wash and dry their hands before handling food, or surfaces likely to come into contact with food, especially after going to the toilet
2. Report any illness symptoms to management immediately including:
 - diarrhoea or vomiting
 - stomach pain, nausea, fever, or jaundice
 - someone living with you with diarrhoea or vomiting
 - infected skin, nose or throat

Staff must refrain from working with or around open food, normally for 48 hours from when symptoms stop naturally.

Cleaning and cross-contamination

If people have been to work while suffering certain infections it is important to ensure that areas that they have come into contact with have been cleaned effectively, to help prevent the spread of infection to other staff or consumers.

For more information on cleaning and cross contamination see our pages:

- [Why is cleaning important](#)
- [Why avoiding cross-contamination is important](#)

Useful resources on fitness to work

UKHSA's [Management of Gastrointestinal Infections](#)

Health and Safety Executive's [Preventing infections at work](#)

Our Safer Food Better Business guide to personal hygiene and fitness to work:

England, Northern Ireland and Wales

PDF

[View Personal hygiene as PDF\(Open in a new window\)](#) (1.66 MB)

Our Safe Catering - your guide to making food safely pack for businesses in Northern Ireland:

Northern Ireland

PDF

[View Safe Catering as PDF\(Open in a new window\)](#) (5.84 MB)

Our fitness to work questionnaire:

WORD

[View Fitness to work questionnaire: Pre-employment, visitor, returning from abroad as Word\(Open in a new window\)](#) (58.26 KB)