

# Health and safety in catering

## Key risk areas



### What is the problem?

This information sheet is aimed at managers and supervisors in the catering and hospitality industry. Data from reported accidents reveals the priority areas for accident prevention in the industry are slips, trips, handling, cuts and exposure to hot and harmful substances.

Work-related contact dermatitis is one of the main causes of ill health for catering staff.

Information from the last three years estimated that for every accident, there were twice as many accidents that went unreported. Data on contact dermatitis for the same period revealed it is twice as prevalent in chefs and catering assistants as the industry average.

New workers are up to two and a half times more likely to have an accident at work than their more experienced colleagues.

Through training on health and safety practices, we can bring these numbers down and give people the opportunity of a long and healthy career in catering.

### What can you do?

HSE web-based guidance is available on the main causes of accidents and risks to health and safety in a catering environment. Catering Information Sheets are also freely available to download from the HSE website.

The rest of this information sheet gives advice on the main risk areas in catering.

### Slips

- Prevent contamination and you reduce or even eliminate the slip risk.
- Avoid spillage and leakage onto the floor.
- Most slip injuries happen on wet floors, so clean up spills immediately.
- Dry floors after wet cleaning, eg after mopping.
- Selecting and using the most appropriate footwear for the work environment can reduce the slip risk.
- The floor in a workplace must be suitable for the type of work activity taking place on it - sensible floor choices mean the risks to those who ultimately use the floor can be managed more effectively.

## **Trips**

- Keep passages and walkways free from obstructions.
- Report damaged or ill-fitting floors that may cause accidents.

## **Handling**

- Avoid lifting items that are too heavy (eg pans, dish trays, furniture). Two people can lift the item if necessary.
- Avoid pushing, pulling or dragging excessive loads.
- Avoid prolonged periods in one position, leading to postural strain.
- Use proper lifting techniques and avoid lifting tasks which involve reaching too high or too low.
- Use lifting aids, eg trolleys or sack trucks.

## **Cuts**

Cuts from sharp objects, including from handling knives and glass, account for about one third of manual handling accidents.

- Be aware of risks and safe procedures when using knives.
- Be aware of risks and safe procedures when handling glass.

## **Exposure to hot and harmful substances**

- Be aware of risks posed by hot surfaces or equipment.

Hot oil or fluids are particularly hazardous, cover all equipment containing hot oil or fluids when not in use.

- Avoid carrying hot liquids and materials if there is a risk of splashes.
- Follow safe procedures for opening steam oven doors.
- Follow safe procedures for cleaning and draining fat fryers.
- Follow safe systems of work in using and storing cleaning substances.
- Ensure personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn where required.

## **Work-related contact dermatitis**

Work-related contact dermatitis is a skin disease caused by work. It is often called eczema and develops when the skin's barrier layer is damaged. This leads to redness, itching, swelling, blistering, flaking and cracking. The most susceptible parts of the body are the hands, followed by the forearms and face. It can be severe enough to keep you off work or even force you to change jobs.

Contact dermatitis is one of the main causes of ill health for catering staff (chefs, cooks and catering assistants) with the number of new cases per year being twice the general industry average. Work-related ill health can cost more than twice as much as an accident causing the injury.

The main causes of contact dermatitis in the catering industry are contact with foods (eg juices from fruit and vegetables, proteins in fish, shellfish, meat and flour), water (ie washing up and food washing), soaps and cleaning products.

Wet work is the term generally used to describe prolonged or frequent contact with water – eg water/chemical mixtures or wet food (tasks such as washing up, washing food, general cleaning, frequent hand washing). Where frequent contact with water/chemical mixtures or wet food risks causing dermatitis it will fall under the requirements of COSHH (the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002). A rule of thumb for wet work is that a total contact of more than 2 hours a day or more than 20 hand washes a day is a risk.

You can prevent dermatitis developing with a few simple measures:

- Avoid contact with cleaning products, food and water where possible, eg use a dishwasher rather than washing up by hand, use utensils rather than hands to handle food.
- Protect your skin. Where you can, wear gloves when working with substances that can cause dermatitis and moisturise your hands to replenish the skin's natural oils.
- Check your hands regularly for the early stages of dermatitis, ie itchy, dry or red skin. These symptoms should be reported to a supervisor, as treatment is much more effective if dermatitis is caught early.

## General

Other areas to note include dangers in the use of equipment, falls from ladders and stairs and fire risks.

## Further reading

The HSE website provides information as well as a number of free leaflets and information sheets that will be useful to help manage the risks. In particular:

'Stop slips in kitchens' in the hospitality industry: [www.hse.gov.uk/slips/kitchens/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/kitchens/index.htm).

Work-related contact dermatitis in the hospitality industry: [www.hse.gov.uk/drp/skin.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/drp/skin.htm).

Catering and hospitality web pages: [www.hse.gov.uk/catering/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/catering/index.htm).

The following information sheets can be downloaded free from the HSE website and are available from HSE Books (see 'Further information').

*Preventing slips and trips in kitchens and food service* Catering Information Sheet CAIS6(rev1) HSE Books 2005 [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/caterdex.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/caterdex.htm)

*Look after your hands in the kitchen* [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/misc762.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/misc762.pdf) (web only)

*Preventing back pain and other aches and pains to kitchen and food service staff* CAIS24 HSE Books 2006 [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/caterdex.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/caterdex.htm)

*Safety during emptying and cleaning of fryers* Catering Information Sheet CAIS17(rev2) HSE Books 2005 [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/caterdex.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/caterdex.htm)

*Safe use of cleaning chemicals in the hospitality industry* Catering Information Sheet CAIS22 HSE Books 2003 [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/caterdex.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/caterdex.htm)

You may find these other information sheets in the catering series useful:

*Health and safety of children and young people in catering* Catering Information Sheet CAIS21 HSE Books 2001 [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/caterdex.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/caterdex.htm)

*Health and safety of new and expectant mothers in the catering industry* Catering Information Sheet CAIS19 HSE Books 2001 [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/caterdex.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/caterdex.htm)

*The main health and safety law applicable to catering* Catering Information Sheet CAIS11 HSE Books 2000 [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/caterdex.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/caterdex.htm)

## **Further information**

HSE priced and free publications are available by mail order from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995 Website: [www.hsebooks.co.uk](http://www.hsebooks.co.uk) (HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops and free leaflets can be downloaded from HSE's website: [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk).)

For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline Tel: 0845 345 0055 Fax: 0845 408 9566 Textphone: 0845 408 9577 e-mail: [hse.infoline@natbrit.com](mailto:hse.infoline@natbrit.com) or write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

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