

**FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY CONSULTATION ON
FOOD HANDLERS: FITNESS TO WORK – REGULATORY GUIDELINES
AND BEST PRACTICE ADVICE FOR FOOD BUSINESS OPERATORS**

EVIDENCE SUBMITTED BY THE SOCIETY FOR GENERAL MICROBIOLOGY (SGM)

Introduction

The Society for General Microbiology, founded in 1945, is an independent professional scientific body dedicated to promoting the 'art and science' of microbiology. It has now established itself as one of the two major societies in the world in its field, with some 5,000 members in the UK and abroad.

General Comments

The guide is well organised and easy to read. The guidance appears to be very practical and should be useful in helping food service operators interpret and implement the law.

Specific Comments

Page 1, Purpose / summary

Bullet point 3 should read: Managers must exclude staff with these symptoms from food handling, while symptoms persist and in most cases for 48 hours after the symptoms cease.

Bullet point 4 should read: Wash their hands and dry them with a clean towel before handling food, or surfaces likely to come into contact with food, especially after going to the toilet.

Page 3, Section 2

In paragraph 3, it would be helpful to have a link to information on where to find specific guidance for other business sectors.

Page 5, Section 7

In paragraph 2, instead of '...affected member of staff could work elsewhere...' consider inserting '... affected member of staff could be permitted to work elsewhere...'.

Page 6, Section 7, Workers in a food handling area

Paragraph 4 should read: Ensure you wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water and dry them on a clean towel before working with or around food, especially after using the toilet

Bullet point 4 should read: after cleaning e.g. surfaces, floors, storage facilities etc.

Paragraph 6 should read: Don't forget to dry your hands thoroughly on a clean towel, because wet hands spread bacteria more easily.

Page 10, Section 10, Non-infective causes of symptoms

Bullet point 3: Dietary indiscretion (e.g. eating too much spicy food) – this seems very dubious; enteritis might well follow consumption of spicy food due to its being contaminated with foodborne bacteria and not due to the spices. It is doubtful whether many people would react to spices with a bout of diarrhoea.

Bullet point 4: Inflammation of the bowel including diverticulitis, ulcerative colitis, and Crohn's disease – this too is possibly unwise advice as the aetiology of Crohn's disease is still ill-defined and microbial causes are postulated by some.

Pages 13 and 14, Annexes 1 and 2

Jaundice should be mentioned somewhere (in relation to risk of Hepatitis A).

Sources

This evidence has been prepared on behalf of SGM by Dr Bernard M. Mackey, University of Reading, and Professor Charles W. Penn, University of Birmingham.

About the SGM

Society membership is largely from universities, research institutions, health and veterinary services, government bodies and industry. The Society has a strong international following, with 25% of membership coming from outside the UK from some 60 countries.

The Society is a 'broad church'; its members are active in a wide range of aspects of microbiology, including medical and veterinary fields, environmental, agricultural and plant microbiology, food, water and industrial microbiology. Many members have specialized expertise in fields allied to microbiology, including biochemistry, molecular biology and genetics. The Society's membership includes distinguished, internationally-recognised experts in almost all fields of microbiology.

Among its activities the Society publishes four high quality, widely-read research journals (*Microbiology*, *Journal of Medical Microbiology*, *Journal of General Virology* and *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology*). It also publishes a highly respected quarterly magazine, *Microbiology Today*, of considerable general educational value. Each year the Society holds two major scientific meetings attended by up to 1500 microbiologists and covering a wide range of aspects of microbiology and virology research.

The governing Council of the SGM has a strong commitment to improving awareness of the critically important role of microbiology in many aspects of human health, wealth and welfare. It has in this connection recently initiated a 'Microbiology Awareness Campaign' aimed at providing information to the government, decision makers, education authorities, media and the public of the major contribution of microbiology to society.

An issue of major concern to the Society is the national shortage of experienced microbiologists, particularly in the field of clinical microbiology and in industry. To attempt to improve this situation long-term, the Society runs an active educational programme focused on encouraging the teaching of microbiology in university and college courses and in the school curriculum, including primary schools. Some 570 schools are corporate members of SGM.

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