Safer Food Supervisor - Definitions

Acute

The rapid onset of symptoms. Also used to describe the severity of the illness.

Aerobic

Requires air/oxygen. Certain bacteria are aerobic and need oxygen to live.

Allergy (Allergenic Reaction)

An Allergenic Reaction is the bodies' extreme sensitivity to a substance which causes a reaction to a particular food/ingredient/additive. Usually occurs within minutes of ingestion, the symptoms can vary mild, tingling, itching, to severe problems including difficulty in swallowing, breathing and death. Even the tiniest traces of an ingredient can be life threatening for the worst sufferers. A common allergy is to nuts/peanuts.

Ambient Temperature

Used to describe room temperature. A temperature that is in the Danger Zone and allows for rapid bacterial multiplication.

Anaerobic

Bacteria that can live only where there is no air/oxygen present.

Anaphylactic Shock

A severe allergic reaction to certain foods or food additives. It causes a fall in blood pressure leading to loss of consciousness and can be life threatening if not quickly treated. Urgent medical assistance is required and usually treated with an injection of adrenaline.

Aseptic

Free from pathogenic micro-organisms.

Aw (Water Activity)

The sign/symbol for water activity. It is the amount of moisture/water available for the bacteria. Pure water is 1.00aw. Bacteria prefer 0.99aw.

Bacillus

A large family of bacteria causing food to spoil, Bacillus is also responsible for some types of diseases. Some Bacillus bacteria strains are helpful and part of our digestive system.

Bacteria

Single-celled organisms of various shapes that can only been seen through a microscope. Most are harmless and many are needed by humans. Some are also known as pathogens and are harmful as they can cause food poisoning and food borne illnesses.

Bactericide

A chemical that destroys bacteria.

Bacterial Food Poisoning

An acute disturbance of the gastro-intestinal tract usually accompanied by abdominal pain, and often with diarrhoea and vomiting. It is caused by eating food contaminated by pathogens or their toxins.

Binary Fission

The method which bacteria multiplies by the division into two cells.

Blanching

The immersion of vegetables into boiling water or steam for a short period before freezing. A process to destroy enzymes and reduce spoilage that can occur in storage.

Carrier

A person infected by a disease causing organism that usually does not display any symptoms but may pass the infection to other people. See Healthy Carrier, Incubatory Carrier, Convalescent Carrier.

Chronic

An illness that develops slowly. The symptoms of a chronic disease may build up gradually and last for a prolonged period.

Cleaning

The application of energy to remove food waste, dirt, grease and other substances that require removing from a food business.

Contact Time

The recommended time a manufacturer states for a disinfectant to reduce pathogenic bacteria to a safe level. For example: spray and leave on a surface for 30 seconds before removing.

Cross-Contamination

The transferring of harmful physical, chemical or, allergenic biological substance into food. Cross-contamination is the transfer of bacterial contamination from one place to another in error or ignorance. Eg touching raw chicken breast then a ready-to-eat dish, and thus the hazard is now present on the previously safe dish.

Control Measure

An action or activity that can be used to prevent or eradicate a food safety hazard or reduce it to an acceptable level.

Convalescent Carrier

A person who continues to excrete organisms whilst recovering from a disease and after symptoms have stopped.

Corrective Action

An action to be taken when the results of monitoring at a Critical Control Point show a loss of control.

Critical Control Point

A step in the process where it is essential to prevent, reduce to an acceptable level or eliminate a food safety hazard. Usually the last step in the food preparation process before being served to the consumer. A typical CCP would be to cook at 75°C for 2 minutes.

Critical Limit

A set limit that can be monitored and maintained to separate the acceptable from the unacceptable.

Danger Zone

The description of the temperature range 5°C to 63°C at which most food poisoning bacteria multiply. 37°C, also body temperature, is when most bacteria multiply at their quickest.

Detergent

A chemical which will help to remove grease, dirt, and food debris so that surfaces can be prepared for disinfection.

Disinfectant

A chemical used for disinfection. Can also be a non-chemical source such as boiling water or steam.

Disinfection

The process of reducing pathogenic bacteria to a safe level using either disinfectant chemicals, or hot water/ steam over 82°C

Endotoxin

A poison produced inside bacteria and released on its death and subsequent break-up of the cell.

Exotoxin

A poison produced by bacteria that is released outside its body without the bacteria having to die.

Facultative Anaerobes

A micro-organism that can survive with or without air/oxygen.

Flow Chart

A step by step flow process diagram that details the sequence of steps used in the production of a certain food item.

Food Borne Disease

An illness caused by a micro-organism such as bacteria and viruses which only use the water or food as a vehicle to enter the human body. Multiplication then takes place once the food borne disease is inside the body.

Food Borne Illness

The overall, general term for an illness linked to food. It covers both pathogenic food poisoning and food borne disease.

Food Handler

Any person who works with food. This can include production, farming, butchers, caterers, retail shop workers, bar staff, waiters, and delivery drivers. Basically anyone who comes into contact with food.

Food Poisoning

An acute illness that often develops rapidly after eating contaminated food. Symptoms usually include abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting. It can be caused by pathogenic bacteria, toxins, chemicals, metals, poisonous plants or fish.

Food Premises

A building where food is manufactured, prepared, cooked, or sold either for profit or not for profit.

Food Safety Management System (FSMS)

A documented set of procedures and records demonstrating that safe food production is taking place. Based on HACCP principles and has been UK/EU law since 2006.

Freezer Burn

The damage caused to frozen foods by dehydration and oxidation due to air reaching the food usually if it has been poorly packaged.

Fungus/Fungi

A single celled micro-organism including mushrooms, toadstools, moulds and yeasts.

Gastro-enteritis

The inflammation of the intestines and stomach from bacterial or viral infection normally causing stomach pains, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.

HACCP

Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point, an approach that seeks to identify hazards to food safety and put in places procedures and checks to dramatically reduce the likelihood of food poisoning occurring. HACCP is the set of principles on which Food Safety Management Systems are based.

Hazard

A biological, chemical or physical entity in food that could cause harm. In food safety we talk about risk and severity associated with a hazard. Risk is the likelihood of the hazard hurting someone; severity is size or magnitude of the situation if it does.

Hazard Analysis

The process of obtaining and evaluating information on a hazard to decide what are the main potential hazards to food safety and what processes should be put in place to reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

Healthy Carrier

A person who is infected by a disease carrying organism who may never develop any symptoms themselves. This type of carrier is extremely dangerous as they are unaware of their condition.

High-Risk Food

Foods that under favourable conditions support the multiplication of pathogenic bacteria and will in all cases, not receive a treatment, (usually cooking), that would reduce the risk before they are eaten by the consumer. Examples of a high risk food are: ready to eat, high protein, moist foods that need refrigeration. Cooked meats, pates, gravy, stock, egg based products, sandwiches, smoked fish, cured fish and cream cakes.

Incubatory Carrier

A person who excretes organisms during the incubation period but shows no signs or symptoms.

Incubation Period

The time between infection and the first signs or symptoms of a disease.

Infective Dose

The number of micro-organisms needed to cause an illness.

Mesophiles

Most pathogenic bacteria are mesophiles and they will multiply in temperatures between 10°C and 50°C with 35°C being the optimum temperature. Examples include: Salmonella, Staphylococcus Aureus, and Campylobacter.

Microbe

The term microbe refers to microorganism such as moulds, enzymes and bacteria. This term is most commonly used to describe harmful bacteria that cause disease, but in many cases microbes can have positive effects such as helping to flavour products, fermentation and assisting in digestion.

Monitor

To conduct a planned sequence of measurements or observations to assess if a Critical Control Point is under control.

Mould

Types of microscopic fungus that can appear as discoloured, growth patches on food. A typical example would be the visible sign of green mould on bread.

Mycotoxin

A toxin produced by some fungi.

Neurotoxin

A toxin that attacks the nervous system.

Obligate Aerobes

An organism that can only survive in air/oxygen.

Obligate Anaerobes

An organism that can only survive without air/oxygen.

Onset Period

The time between consumption of contaminated food and the first signs or symptoms of an illness.

Organoleptic

An inspection of a food product by the use of smell, sight, taste, or touch.

Osmosis

The process by which water moves in and out of cells. Used as a process of extending product life with the use of sugar or salt to draw the moisture out of a food product.

Outbreak

The term used when two or more cases of food poisoning are reported in a business. Also when 2 or more people from the same family/working group have the same food poisoning illness.

Oxidation

A chemical reaction involving oxygen that changes the taste or texture of food.

Pathogen

Disease-producing bacteria that cause food poisoning or a food-borne disease.

Psychrophiles

Bacteria that will grow between -5°C and 20°C. 10°C is the optimum for multiplication.

Psychrotrophs

Bacteria that will grow between 0°C and 35°C. 20°C is the optimum for multiplication. Will readily grow at refrigerator temperatures and is a danger to control. Examples include: Listeria.

Sanitiser

A chemical that combines a detergent cleaner and a disinfectant in one product.

Spoilage

The decomposition of food by bacteria, moulds, enzymes or chemicals. The process by which food deteriorates from the moment it is harvested due to attacks by microorganisms such as bacteria, moulds, enzymes or chemicals.

Spore

Some bacteria have the ability to produce spores. They develop to protect the bacteria cell in adverse conditions such as cooking, chilling, or chemical attack. The multiplication of bacteria then recommences in more favourable conditions, for example when it is back in the Danger Zone.

Sterilisation

A heat treatment process that destroys all living micro-organisms.

Thermophiles

Bacteria that will grow between 40°C and 80°C. 50°C is the optimum for multiplication. Examples include bacteria that cause spoilage in canned foods.

Toxin

A poison produced by pathogenic bacteria. Examples include Staphylococcus aureus and Bacillus cereus. Toxin can also be naturally occurring in foods such as uncooked red kidney beans. Another type of toxin can be produced in the storage process of certain fish such as mackerel, tuna and sardines, this is called Scombrotoxic fish poisoning.

Traceability

The ability to trace or identify batches of raw materials, food in the production process, or finished food products so that in the event of a failure at a Critical Control Point they can be identified and isolated.

Unfit Food

Food unfit for human consumption.

Validation

Obtaining evidence that your Food Safety Management System or HACCP Plan is operating correctly.

Verification

The procedures, methods and testing, (in addition to monitoring), used to determine that your Food Safety Management System or HACCP Plan is operating correctly.

Verocytotoxin

A very powerful toxin produced by bacteria such as E coli 0157.

Virus

An infective agent that typically consists of a nucleic acid molecule in a protein coat which can only multiply in the living cells of the host such as humans.

Water Activity (Aw)

The sign/symbol for water activity. It is the amount of moisture/water available for the bacteria. Pure water is 1.00aw. Bacteria prefer 0.99aw.

All our definitions are written to be in context with our Level 3 Food Hygiene Course - Safer Food Supervisor and therefore may be different to a standard dictionary definition which may not assist you in understanding the word or term as we have used it within the course materials.