Colchester City Council

A FRESH START TO THE YEAR

Welcome to the food team's first newsletter, which we hope will help you all. We will publish this newsletter twice a year and it will also be available on our website. Please take a moment to read the latest update and share it with your team. We hope these updates serve as useful reminders.

We will review common issues identified during our inspections and provide tips on complying with legislation and maintaining or improving your food hygiene rating.

Both food Safety and health & safety issues will be included; and in each issue we will have a 'specific Focus Point.' This newsletter is chopping boards and the poor state the food team finds during inspections. Please take five minutes to look at the example and renew if your chopping boards are like the example.

- **Please display the correct Food Hygiene Rating**
- **Allergens – Standardised your recipes**
- **Cleaning is Everyone's Responsibility**
- **Myth Buster: Food Hygiene Rating of 1 is only due to no paperwork**
- **Stop Extending the Shelf Life of Food**
- **Gas Safety Inspection and Appliances**
- **New and Emerging Gas Safety Risks**
- **Reporting Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences**

Focus Point:
Chopping Boards

- **REPLACE heavily worn boards that can no longer be cleaned or disinfected**
- **DO NOT store raw and ready to eat chopping boards together. You could even consider separate drying racks.**
- **DO NOT stack boards on top of one another after cleaning, this leads to potential mold growth.**
- **DO NOT wipe boards with dirty cloths.**
- **DO change boards during service.**



Colchester City Council is pleased to announce that as part of healthy eating initiative and to promote businesses that offer healthy choices, that the official launch of Tuck in will be at the town hall in September on Monday the 21st September 2026 from 1.30 pm onwards.

For further information or if you wish to apply, please see below. On the day Council officers will be at the venue if you wish to sign up on the day.



Are you displaying the correct food hygiene rating score?

Although it's not required by law in England, we encourage you to display your Food Hygiene Rating, regardless of the score.

Please note that it is an offence to display an incorrect score, so if your score changes, ensure you update the sticker. Colchester City Council is checking the premises rating when we attend an inspection or are at premises due to complaints.

Allergens: Standardised your recipes

Allergens are frequently highlighted in the press, and with recent incidents, more rule changes are likely. It's crucial to standardrised your recipes. If you use an allergen matrix, review it regularly, especially regarding ingredient purchases, as suppliers are not required to notify you of changes.

For standard menu dishes, avoid chef variations to prevent accidental allergen introduction. For example, one chef may use onion, carrot, and garlic (no allergens) for stock, while another might add celery, introducing an allergen.

When reviewing your stock, don't forget about the dry stores including any sauces that are provided to customers. Never guess or assume that everything remains the same.

When you change a dish, inform the front-of-house staff and provide them with the most up to date information, including updated allergen matrices, and ensure old versions are removed to avoid confusion.

Staff can also take part in some online training for free on the Food Standards website: https://allergytraining.food.gov.uk

Cleaning – is everyone's responsibility

We have noticed a decline in standards over the past few years, and it's time for change. Remember, cleaning is considered in your food hygiene rating, so it's important to stay up to date with it.

Please review your cleaning schedules to determine daily, weekly, and monthly tasks, focusing on hand contact surfaces (e.g. equipment handles, light switches, plugs, and sockets). Set realistic expectations and encourage teamwork to achieve goals.

Ensure staff have the right equipment and cleaning products. Poor quality cleaning tools discourage proper cleaning. Cleaning should be everyone's responsibility, and if you clean as you go, it will be quicker. Remember, just because you didn't cause the mess doesn't mean you can't help to clean it up.



Allocate sufficient space for cleaning equipment and materials, keeping those used for the toilets separate to those used within the kitchen.

Remember, cleaning schedules need to be regularly reviewed. If your premises aren't clean, your cleaning schedule is not working, and it needs amending.

FOOD ALLERGIES AND INTOLERANCES



A SCORE OF 1 ON THE FOOD HYGIENE RATING SCHEME IS ONLY DUE TO NO DOCUMENTATION

The assumption is incorrect, while lack of documentation can contribute to a poor rating, it is not the sole reason for a score of 1 on the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. Several factors can influence the rating including:

Hygiene: Poor food handling, temperature control, staff hygiene, and the implementation of inadequate cross contamination controls are all factors.

Structure and Cleaning: Poor design and layout leading to cross contamination and compromised food safety, evidence of pest infestation and inadequate waste disposal can be contributing factors.

Confidence in Management: Lack of understanding and implementation of significant hazard controls, failure to improve food safety procedures, inadequate staff supervision, instruction, and training, and a poor track record with resistance to food safety and hygiene controls can all feature into the food hygiene rating score.

To be awarded with a score of 1, you may receive a score of 20 in any one of these categories.



STOP EXTENDING THE SHELF LIFE OF FOOD

We've noticed some businesses extending the shelf life of products.

When you remove foods from their original packaging, you cannot extend the manufacturer's shelf life.

Use by this is a strict date by which the food must be used or consumed by. Using or selling food beyond this date is an offence.

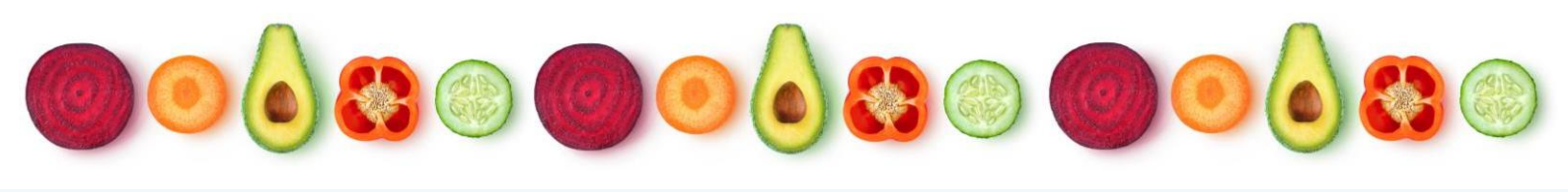
Best before: Relates to the quality of the product. It is not an offence to sell or use foods beyond their best before; but their quality will be reduced. If you choose to use food beyond its best before date, you are responsible for ensuring its safety, (not the manufacturer).

Long life: Some foods have a long shelf life, but once opened, this may be reduced substantially. For example, tinned tuna has a long shelf life, but once opened it is reduced to **2 days** by most manufacturers...

Vacuum packing: This may appear to extend shelf life, but there is still a limit. Most manufacturers, especially large-scale ones, invest in microbiological and shelf-life testing to determine the life of their product.

Remember, the allocated shelf life only applies to sealed products. Once the seal is broken, the product's shelf life is reduced. For example, a vacuum-packed block of cheese with a 2-month shelf life may only last **7 days** once opened.

For those who vacuum pack your own products, remember to limit the shelf life to 10 days for raw products, unless exemptions apply. For ready-to-eat food, the guideline of 10 days may be reduced to no more than **5 days** to control the risk of Listeria.



HEALTH & SAFETY

You may not see health and safety officers routinely, but they are still around. Are you aware that both you and your employer have duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974?

Gas safety inspection & appliances

Ensure that all gas appliances, flues, pipework, and safety devices are maintained in a safe condition.

Gas work should be carried out by a competent person, such as a Gas Safe registered engineer, qualified for the required tasks.

Inspection and servicing frequencies vary by equipment type and usage. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions. Annual inspections are recommended, with repairs made as needed

Catering and hospitality staff should be trained in safe usage, identifying faults, and appropriate actions.

Routine tasks like connecting and disconnecting equipment for cleaning or changing cylinders or hoses, can be done by competent individuals, but only Gas Safe registered personnel can perform new installations or commission appliances.

You must have a valid gas safety certificate for your gas appliances.

Gas Safe:
www.gassaferegister.co.uk

New & emerging concerns in gas safety

The use of solid fuel appliances like tandoori ovens, charcoal grills and wood fired pizza ovens in commercial kitchens has increased, raising the risk of carbon monoxide exposure.

Before purchasing an appliance, ensure you have adequate ventilation, and that the appliance is designed for indoor use.

Check if the flue/extraction system is made of suitable material. Stainless steel can withstand the corrosive products released during solid fuel burning, but galvanised steel may corrode, potentially causing carbon monoxide leakage. If you don't plan to change your extraction system, seek further advice from a competent person.

Invest in a carbon monoxide alarm and ensure it is routinely maintained and tested.

Further advice is available on the Health and Safety Executive website
www.hse.gov.uk

Reporting of diseases and dangerous occurrences

You must report certain workplace injuries under the legislation, including specified injuries, over-7-day injuries, fatalities, and injuries to persons other than your employees.

We would like to highlight the other side of the regulations and the need to report certain occupational diseases and dangerous occurrences.

Be aware that certain occupational diseases, such as occupational dermatitis and occupational asthma, must also be reported.

Additionally, dangerous occurrences, including fires that necessitate the suspension of work activities for more than 24 hours, require reporting.

The examples provided are not exhaustive; the list of reportable occupational diseases and dangerous occurrences is much longer.

For further information, search RIDDOR on www.hse.gov.uk