

# Babergh Foodwise



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# ICE

**make  
sure your  
drinks  
are safe**

**R**eaders who have been with Foodwise from the start may think this article sounds familiar! In Issue 3 (Spring 2004) we described how Food and Safety Officers had been sampling ice from premises in the Babergh district during the previous August and found that two-thirds of samples were unsatisfactory due to the presence of coliform bacteria.

**Well, we have been sampling ice again during Summer 2008 and although results were considerably better than five years ago, there is still room for improvement (see table).**

	Number of ice samples taken	Number of unsatisfactory samples%	Unsatisfactory samples
2003	18	12	67%
2008	26	8	31%

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## So what's going wrong?

Samples are classified as unsatisfactory if they are found to contain coliform bacteria - which is found in human and animal intestines and also in the environment. They should not be present in ice or ice machines, so if they are detected in an ice sample then contamination has occurred, for example:

- Dirty utensils have been used to scoop the ice
- Staff have been touching the internal surfaces of the ice machine or the ice itself without washing their hands
- Scoops have been left inside the machine (the handle is then in contact with the ice)
- The machine has not been cleaned and sanitised often enough (or thoroughly enough)

It's important to remember that the low temperatures in an ice machine will slow down the growth of bacteria, but will not kill them.

## Why does it matter?

Dr Suzanne Surman, from the Health Protection Agency's Specialist and Reference Microbiology Division, said after the 2003 sampling exercise: "Ice cubes have been found to cause outbreaks of gastrointestinal disease in the past and to prevent this from happening again, it is important that they meet the required standards.

"Coliform bacteria are present in the human gut and do no harm, but they are useful to show us whether there is the possibility of faecal



"Ice cubes have been found to cause outbreaks of gastrointestinal disease in the past ..."



contamination, for example, when food handlers have not washed their hands properly after going to the toilet. "The fact that we have found them present in ice cubes that are intended for human consumption shows us that the hygiene measures observed when handling ice need to be greatly improved if outbreaks are to be avoided."

### **What do we need to do?**

It's good to see that more than two-thirds of the ice samples taken during the 2008 sampling exercise we classified as satisfactory, however we would like to get the failures down to zero.

The main things to remember are:

- The use and maintenance of your ice machine should be included in your food safety management system (whether you are using Safer Food Better Business or an alternative system). By doing so you can ensure that all staff are aware of the necessary control measures:

## *Staff should always wash their hands before handling ice*

- Ice is food, and should be stored and handled as carefully as any other ready to eat food
- Staff should always wash their hands before handling ice
- All equipment which comes into contact with ice, eg the ice machine itself, scoops, ice buckets, etc, should be regularly cleaned and sanitised
- Ice machines should never be used for storing or chilling other items (for example soft drinks).

For more information on ensuring your ice is safe, contact [food.safety@babergh.gov.uk](mailto:food.safety@babergh.gov.uk) and ask for a copy of our recently updated leaflet, A Guide to Safe Ice for Drinks.

## Your Food Safety Management System - keeping it live

It's now more than three years since the new food safety legislation came into force which requires all food businesses to prepare and maintain a documented Food Safety Management System (FSMS).

The vast majority of food businesses in Babergh District, and the rest of the county, are using Safer Food Better Business as their FSMS.

Babergh hopes that you're finding that your FSMS is an asset to your business.

### Potential benefits include:

- Quicker inspections, as the officer can check through your FSMS rather than having to ask you or your chef lots of questions
- Saving time and money on staff training - staff can be trained in the content of your FSMS rather than sent on external courses.
- Reduced waste as the food operation is better managed.
- Evidence of how you are managing food safety which you can show in the event of a complaint or other problem - this is called a due diligence defence. Of course all of these benefits only come from a FSMS which is up-to-date and central to the day-to-day operation of the food business.

Unfortunately we are finding on some inspections that daily monitoring of control measures has lapsed, or that practices have changed from those that were originally recorded in the FSMS.

Your FSMS must be a 'live document' ie brought to the attention of all staff and kept up to date so that it really reflects what happens in your premises.

Only then will it provide you with a possible due diligence defence, should you need it.

If you haven't looked at your FSMS in detail for a while - and to be fair we wouldn't expect you to do this every day - read through it, and ask your staff to do the same.

You might find that you have changed the way you do things since you prepared your documentation - no problem - you just need to update the FSMS.

A couple of areas which commonly need updating for example are lists of suppliers and staff training records.

Remember, keep your FSMS live. It will help you to run your food operation safely, legally and efficiently, and could ultimately save your business if something goes wrong!





## Cross-contamination campaign

In the summer of 2008, officers from Mid-Suffolk District Council investigated an outbreak of E coli O157 food poisoning.

All of the cases were young men who had eaten food from a particular takeaway in Mid-Suffolk's area.

Three of the young men were hospitalised, although all subsequently recovered.

On visiting the takeaway officers found poor separation of raw and ready-to-eat foods, in particular raw burgers defrosting above prepared lettuce in a refrigerator.

The takeaway was in good structural order and was clean, but this failure to

during inspections.

The intention is to focus on this issue from April 2009 onwards during routine inspections of caterers, butchers shops and other food businesses where the potential for cross-contamination is high.

Matters which we will focus on will include:

- Storage of raw and ready-to-eat foods.
- Preparation of raw and ready-to-eat foods.
- Equipment which may be used in contact with both raw and ready-to-eat foods.
- Hand washing arrangements.
- Staff training.
- Inclusion of all of the above in the Food Safety Management System.

Businesses will be given advice on how to put things right in the first instance if failures are found but if the business continues to fail to prevent cross-contamination -

formal action will be taken to protect public health.

If this issue is relevant to your businesses, look out for a flyer which we will be sending out in March 2009 to launch the campaign. For further advice in the meantime contact [food.safety@babergh.gov.uk](mailto:food.safety@babergh.gov.uk).

*... poor separation of raw and ready-to-eat foods, in particular raw burgers defrosting above prepared lettuce in a refrigerator.*

separate raw and ready-to-eat foods had put lives at risk.

Following the investigation the Suffolk Food Liaison Group, which comprises of food officers from all seven local authorities, decided that we should concentrate on cross-contamination



# Outbreak news

Norovirus (also known as Winter Vomiting - the bug that regularly causes outbreaks on cruise ships) continues to be the most common cause of outbreaks of vomiting and diarrhoea in the Babergh District. The last food poisoning outbreak that Babergh

officers were involved in investigating was an outbreak of Salmonella in a health-care setting in 2003.

Since then all outbreaks have been either positively identified as or suspected to be Norovirus.



## Outbreaks in 2008

### *the wedding reception*

**From a wedding reception of approximately 50 guests, around 20 suffered from either vomiting or diarrhoea within a day or so of the wedding.**

**We visited the hotel to discuss food preparation methods, etc; these appeared satisfactory. We soon began to learn of 'secondary cases', i.e. illness in people who did not attend the reception, but were contacts of those who had been ill. Norovirus was subsequently confirmed in one faecal sample.**





## Outbreaks in 2008 *the rugby tournament*

**Sixth form students from around the UK attended a rugby tournament in Ipswich. A number of the students who stayed in a hotel in the Babergh District suffered a short-lived illness with symptoms including vomiting and diarrhoea. Investigations soon suggested that food was unlikely to be the source but revealed that those that were ill stayed in the same part of the hotel. The conclusion was that at least one person came to the tournament already infected with Norovirus and passed the illness to those who they came into contact with.**

### Top tips for avoiding a Norovirus outbreak at your premises:

- Where customers can help themselves to food this should be closely monitored by staff and any that may have been contaminated (eg by coughing or sneezing) must be removed immediately. Food should be kept covered for as much of the time as possible.
- Staff with vomiting and/or diarrhoea must be excluded from work until they have been free of symptoms for 48 hours.
- Ideally staff and public toilets should be separate.
- Food handlers should always wash their hands after visiting the toilet and regularly throughout the day.
- Food handlers should not eat or drink in food preparation areas.



# Scores on the Doors - coming soon!

**Babergh was pleased to learn in December that the Food Standards Agency have decided that the national Scores on the Doors scheme will be based on five stars. However there is still no date to launch the national scheme, so Babergh, along with four of the other Suffolk Authorities, hope to launch as soon as possible this year subject to councillors approval.**

## **How will the scheme work?**

Following routine inspections, food premises are scored on different aspects of the food operation including hygiene, structure and confidence in management. This will generate star ratings ranging from no stars for poorly compliant premises, to five stars for premises which are fully compliant with hygiene legislation. The food business operator will be sent a certificate which they can display on their premises showing their star rating, and all star ratings will be displayed on the Babergh website.

## **How do I get five stars?**

You need to ensure that your business complies fully with the hygiene legislation. In short this means that you must have a documented food safety management system and be implementing it fully, your premises must be in good repair and be kept clean, and your staff must be trained and competent.

## **When will I get my certificate?**

Following your next routine inspection in accordance with our inspection programme. For some businesses this may be up to two years away, but we are unfortunately not able to carry out additional or 'early' inspections.

## **Will all premises be awarded a star rating?**

All premises will be given a star rating except the lowest risk premises which are not routinely visited, for example village halls, businesses which have very few customers, and businesses which only sell low risk foods.

## **Do I have to display the certificate?**

Display of certificates will be voluntary at this stage. However as your customers become more aware of the scheme, if they don't see a certificate at your premises they may ask you why!

## **What happens if I disagree with my star rating?**

You will be able to appeal via Babergh's Complaints Procedure.

## **What happens next?**

If you have not already, you will soon receive a letter telling you more about the scheme and what star rating you would receive now based on your last routine inspection, so you can take action to improve standards at your premises before you receive your first certificate! In the meantime for more information contact [safety@babergh.gov.uk](mailto:safety@babergh.gov.uk)

