

Calibration

If your business involves cooking or reheating foods, one of your control measures may be to check the core temperature of the food with a probe thermometer to make sure it's hot enough, a minimum of 70°C for example. But how do you know if your thermometer is giving you a correct reading? If it's fairly new it should be accurate enough, but that accuracy can certainly

decrease over a period of time. So how can you check it?

If you have more than one probe thermometer, a very simple way is just to compare them against each other. But if you only have one or if you would prefer a slightly more 'scientific' approach, the melting ice and boiling water calibration method is ideal.

Melting ice calibration method

To check accuracy at the low temperature range:
Stir the probe in a mixture of ice and a small amount of cold water until a steady reading is achieved. The reading on the thermometer should be between -1°C and +1°C.



Boiling water calibration method

To check the thermometer at the high temperature range:
Stir the probe in boiling unsalted water until a steady reading is achieved. The reading on the thermometer should be between 99°C and 101°C. Please take care when using boiling liquids.



If the temperature goes outside these temperature ranges the unit should be repaired or replaced. It is recommended that the above procedure is carried out on a regular basis,

for example once a month, and records kept. Then if you are ever in a position where you need to prove that your hot food temperature records are reliable, you'll be able to do so!

Fit to work?

We all know that food contaminated by harmful micro-organisms can cause illness. One way food can be contaminated is by the person handling the food. When a food handler is suffering from, or a carrier of an infectious disease they can transmit the micro-organisms onto the food and contaminate it.

It is important that food handlers do not contaminate food. Managers must therefore exclude potentially infectious food handlers from the premises. Food handlers must also report to their manager any infectious or potentially infectious symptoms and ensure they observe good hygiene practices. The general rule is that anyone suffering from vomiting and/or diarrhoea must stay away from work for *at least 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased* (without the use of any medication). Some of the more serious types of food poisoning have more stringent requirements, for example food handlers infected with E. coli O157 must give two clear stool samples before returning to work.

If your food business is a 'one-man band' it can be tempting to soldier on even though you're not well, rather than letting your customers down. But it's just not worth it; you run a high risk of contaminating the food. It's far better to have an arrangement with someone competent who can cover for you whilst you are unwell, or, failing that, not trade until 48 hours after you have recovered. A couple of day's lost earnings is preferable to a food poisoning outbreak that may well spell the end of your business.

If you need any advice about food handlers fitness to work contact the Environmental Health Department by phone or email foodwise@babergh.gov.uk.