

Call to Action for Industry

Using Food Safety Management Systems to Increase Handwashing Compliance



U.S. FOOD & DRUG
ADMINISTRATION

Human Foods Program

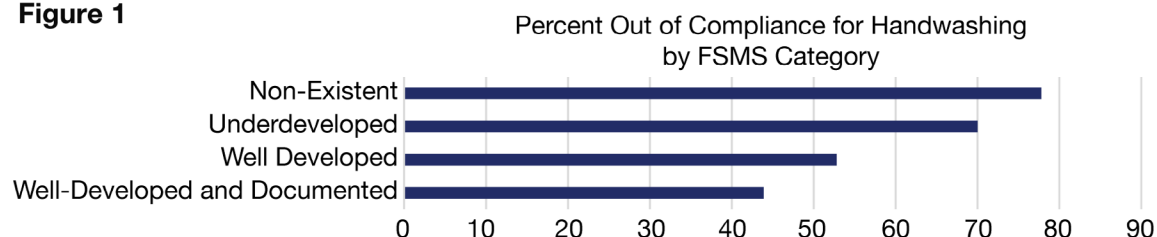
What did the 2019-2022 retail food store deli data collection find out about Food Safety Management Systems?

The 2019-2022 retail food store deli (deli) data collection of the National Retail Risk Factor Study found that Food Safety Management Systems (FSMS) were the best indicator of whether delis were following important food safety procedures and practices to prevent foodborne illness. A FSMS refers to a specific set of actions or procedures to help achieve active managerial control over the risks. While FSMS vary across the retail and food service industry, the consistent components include the purposeful implementation of procedures, training, and monitoring. For more information and complete results of our data collection see [FDA's Retail Food Risk Factor Study](#).

Our study observed that current handwashing policies, training, and monitoring fell short in several areas, highlighting the need for establishments to develop more comprehensive systems to promote consistent handwashing. One of the key findings from this study indicates that as the development and documentation of FSMS improves, we see increased compliance with good handwashing practices (Figure 1). This indicates that FSMS may be a promising tool in fostering safe food handling behaviors in a more comprehensive and sustainable manner than individual interventions such as training alone.

What does the FDA Food Code outline for handwashing?

Figure 1



The Food Code utilizes two strategies to prevent contamination of food, equipment, utensils, and linens due to poor personal hygiene:

- Proper handwashing (how and when)
- Preventing contact with ready-to-eat food with bare hands

All stages of handwashing are equally important and work together to enhance efficacy. Therefore, effective handwashing must include scrubbing, rinsing, and drying the hands. When done properly, each stage of handwashing further decreases the number of pathogens on the hands.

Handwashing done properly can result in a 2-3 log reduction in transient bacteria and a 2-log reduction in viruses and protozoa. With heavy contamination, handwashing may be ineffective in completely decontaminating the hands. Therefore, further intervention such as a barrier between hands and ready-to-eat food is necessary.

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Why is handwashing important?

Prevention of Foodborne Illnesses

Food workers handle many surfaces, tools, and ingredients that may carry harmful microorganisms like Salmonella, E. coli, Listeria, and norovirus. Proper handwashing helps prevent transferring these germs to food, which can cause serious illnesses in customers.

Protection Against Cross-Contamination

Hands can easily transfer bacteria, viruses, and allergens from raw foods (like raw meat, poultry, seafood, or eggs) to ready-to-eat foods (like salads or baked goods). Washing hands thoroughly reduces this risk and helps maintain food safety standards.

The spread of germs from the hands of food workers to food is a common cause of foodborne illness outbreaks in restaurants. It accounts for nine of ten outbreaks in which food was contaminated by food workers. Improving food worker handwashing practices is critical to preventing outbreaks of diseases like norovirus, Campylobacter, Salmonella, and E. coli. The FDA Food Code recommends how and when food workers should wash their hands, but not all workers follow these recommendations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that workers wash their hands when they should about one in three times.

What can the retail food industry do to improve FSMS and improve handwashing compliance?

FSMS are a promising practice to reduce foodborne illness risk factors. The National Retail Risk Factor Study categorized FSMS into four categories: non-existent, underdeveloped, well-developed, and well-developed and documented. Well-developed and documented systems have the greatest impact on compliance with the food code provisions on handwashing. These FSMS are complete, consistent, and primarily written. Maintaining documentation of the FSMS can be vital to its success. Procedures

Benefits of a Well-Developed and Documented Food Safety Management System (FSMS)
Provides staff with a tangible set of instructions to use for their training/guidance.
Allows you to maintain physical documents to discuss with your regulator when food safety issue arise. These are opportunities to improve your system and build a partnership with your regulatory authority to prevent foodborne illness.
Documents activities to verify that the activities in the FSMS were properly completed.
In many cases, records can serve a dual purpose of ensuring quality and food safety.

From 2017 FDA Food Code, Annex 4 – Management of Food Safety Practices – Achieving Active Managerial Control of Foodborne Illness Risk Factors, HACCP Principle 7: Establish record-keeping and documentation procedures, p. 574.

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Delis should develop, implement, and strengthen their procedures, training, and monitoring within their establishment to create well-developed and documented FSMS to address handwashing.

Procedures, training, and monitoring are the three major focus areas of a FSMS. Resources on how these focus areas and how to develop a FSMS are in the resources section of this document. A well-developed and documented FSMS should result in employees and management being able to complete the actions below.

Procedures

- Management should be able to:
 - Describe critical steps in the food preparation process where handwashing should be addressed
 - Identify how and when steps/tasks are performed to ensure that proper handwashing is achieved
 - Identify specific employees responsible for correctly handwashing in the food preparation process
 - Produce written materials (standard operating procedures; posters; wall charts; wallet cards; etc.) that support implementation of handwashing

Training

- Management should be able to:
 - Confirm that handwashing is included in the establishment's training program
 - Describe how and when employees are trained on handwashing in the food preparation process
 - Identify specific employees who are responsible for training employees on handwashing in the food preparation process
 - Provide written materials (PowerPoint presentations; videos; handouts; course books or policy manuals; reminder cards; wall charts; posters; etc.) to support training methods.
 - Train employees on the handwashing policy, including regularly reviewing responsibilities with the food employees
 - Additional training information can be found:
 - [Retail Food Industry/Regulatory Assistance and Training | FDA](#)
 - [Retail Food Protection Industry Educational Materials | FDA](#)

Monitoring

- Management should be able to:
 - Describe how and when they observe critical steps in the food preparation process to ensure food employees are following the establishment's procedures
 - Identify specific employees who are responsible for monitoring critical steps in the food preparation process
 - Describe corrective actions taken when critical steps in the food preparation process are skipped or applied improperly

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- Produce written forms/records/logs/checklists etc., used to document monitoring of critical steps in the food preparation process within their establishment
- Monitor food employees for handwashing procedure and timing (how and when to wash)
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Resources

[The FDA Food Code](#) is the primary model resource for food safety provisions, and provides guidance for handwashing in retail food establishments. Below is a list of links to specific parts in the Food Code and its annexes to assist retail food establishments in this effort to improve handwashing at retail and foster FSMS. The annexes are provided specifically to assist industry professionals in applying the provisions of the Food Code uniformly and effectively. These resources can provide tremendous assistance to those charged with applying Food Code provisions.

Part 2-2 Employee Health
Part 2-3 Personal Cleanlines
Part 2-4 Hygienic Practices

Below is a list of other federal resources available that can be used to assist in the development of FSMS. We encourage establishments to utilize and share these and other available resources to make progress towards the prevention of foodborne illness risk factors.

- [Employee Health and Personal Hygiene Handbook](#)
- [Managing Food Safety: A Manual for the Voluntary Use of HACCP Principles for Operators of Food Service and Retail Establishments](#)
- [FDA Bad Bug Book](#)
- [Foodborne Illness Video Testimonials](#)
- [Foodborne Illness Posters](#)
- [Food Worker Handwashing in Restaurants | Restaurant Food Safety | CDC](#)
- [About Handwashing | Clean Hands | CDC](#)

Questions?

For more information visit [FDA's Retail Food Protection webpage](#).