

The 25 Most Common Food Safety Failures

The findings that come up time and again in Irish hospitality — from EHO inspections, food safety audits, and food poisoning incidents. Is your business clear of all 25?

These 25 failures have been identified repeatedly in EHO inspection reports, FSAI enforcement actions, and food safety audits across Irish hospitality. **Many of them are simple to fix — once you know they exist.** Most food safety incidents in Ireland are preventable. Work through this list and note any that apply to your operation — those are the priorities to address.



Temperature & Storage Failures

The single biggest category in food poisoning incidents

1

Fridges running above 5°C

Critical

One of the most common critical findings in EHO inspections. An overloaded fridge, a faulty door seal, or a unit positioned near a heat source can cause the temperature to creep above the legal limit — without staff ever noticing if temperatures aren't being monitored.

2

Raw meat stored above cooked food in fridges

Critical

Raw proteins must always be stored on the lowest shelf. Any drip from raw meat falling onto cooked or ready-to-eat food is a cross-contamination event. This is one of the most frequently cited findings in Irish food safety inspections.

3

Hot food held below 63°C

Critical

Food that is held hot for service — in bains-marie, lamps, or hot holds — must be maintained at 63°C or above. Partially heated or cooling food in the temperature danger zone (5–63°C) creates conditions for rapid bacterial growth.

4

Prepared food left at room temperature for extended periods

Critical

Cooked food that is cooling down or waiting to be plated must move through the danger zone (5–63°C) quickly. Leaving prepped food on counters for long periods — particularly in warm kitchens — is a major cause of food poisoning in hospitality.

5

No FIFO rotation — expired stock in use

Common

Using older stock after newer deliveries arrive is one of the most common causes of food safety complaints. Expired use-by dates found in fridges or dry stores during an EHO inspection result in immediate disposal of affected stock and a formal finding.

**HACCP & Documentation Failures**

The most common category overall in Irish EHO inspections

6

No written HACCP plan in place

Critical

A HACCP-based food safety management system is a legal requirement under EU Regulation 852/2004. Any food business that cannot produce a written HACCP plan during an inspection is in direct breach of food safety law.

7

Temperature logs incomplete or not being completed

Common

Many businesses have temperature log sheets but staff aren't completing them consistently. Gaps in logs — even short ones — are treated by EHOs as evidence that monitoring is not taking place. Blank log sheets look worse than not having them at all.

8

HACCP plan not reviewed after menu or process changes

Common

A HACCP plan written for last year's menu that doesn't reflect current dishes or processes is non-compliant. Inspectors will check whether the plan matches what is actually happening in the kitchen.

9

Corrective actions not documented when CCPs are breached

Common

When a critical control point is breached — a temperature excursion, a delivery rejected — the corrective action must be written down. "We threw it out" is not sufficient without a written record of what happened and what was done.

10

Traceability records missing or incomplete

Common

In the event of a food safety incident or recall, you must be able to trace every food product back to its supplier. Missing delivery records, supplier invoices, or batch information can make a recall or investigation significantly more serious.

**Personal Hygiene Failures**

Inspectors observe staff as well as records

11

Food handlers not trained in food safety

Critical

All staff who handle food must have completed appropriate food safety training. Untrained staff — including temporary, agency, or casual workers — are a direct compliance failure. Training records must be on-site and available for inspection.

12

Sick staff handling food

Critical

Any staff member with vomiting, diarrhoea, jaundice, or an infected wound must be excluded from food handling. The absence of a written illness reporting policy — or a culture where staff are expected to work through illness — is one of the most serious risk factors in hospitality food safety.

13

Incorrect or insufficient handwashing

Common

Handwashing sinks in food prep areas must be dedicated — not used for food preparation. They must be stocked with liquid soap and paper towels at all times. Hand dryers are not acceptable in food preparation areas. EHOs frequently check handwashing facilities during inspections.

14

Jewellery and watches worn in the kitchen

Common

Jewellery — other than a plain wedding band — should not be worn during food preparation. Rings, watches, and bracelets can harbour bacteria and may fall into food undetected. This is a consistently observed issue during inspections.

15

Protective clothing not worn or not changed when contaminated

Common

Clean protective clothing should be put on at the start of each shift. Protective clothing worn outside the kitchen — or kept on when handling waste — defeats its purpose entirely and is regularly observed during inspections.



Cleaning & Sanitation Failures

The visible failures that immediately concern inspectors

16

No written cleaning schedule

Common

A verbal cleaning rota is not sufficient. Every food business must have a written cleaning schedule that assigns tasks, sets frequency, and specifies the products to be used. Without one, it's impossible to demonstrate due diligence if something goes wrong.

17

Cross-contamination from incorrect use of chopping boards

Critical

Colour-coded chopping boards exist for a reason. Using the wrong board — or using a board for both raw and ready-to-eat food — is one of the most common causes of cross-contamination in kitchens and is frequently cited in food poisoning investigations.

18

Damaged or scored chopping boards and food contact surfaces

Common

Deep cuts and scratches in chopping boards harbour bacteria that cannot be removed even with thorough cleaning. Damaged boards must be replaced. Inspectors will check the condition of all food contact surfaces, including boards, utensils, and work surfaces.

19

Cleaning chemicals stored near or above food

Critical

Cleaning products must be stored separately from food — never above food storage areas, and never in food containers or unlabelled bottles. Incorrect chemical storage is a standard finding in inspections and poses a serious risk of chemical contamination.

20

Temperature probes not cleaned between uses

Common

A probe used on raw chicken and then inserted into a cooked burger without cleaning is a cross-contamination event. Probe wipes or sanitiser must be used between checks, and this should be part of your documented HACCP procedure.

**Allergen Management Failures**

An area of increasing enforcement focus

21

No allergen matrix for the menu

Critical

Every dish on the menu must have a documented allergen breakdown identifying all 14 major allergens. An allergen matrix that hasn't been updated to reflect the current menu is treated as non-compliant. This is now one of the highest-priority areas in EHO inspections.

22

Staff unable to answer customer allergen queries

Critical

Customer-facing staff must be able to accurately describe which allergens are present in every dish. An inspector may ask a member of staff directly. Incorrect information given to an allergic customer is not just a legal failure — it can be fatal.

23

Allergen information inconsistent across menus and specials

Common

Allergen information must be accurate and consistent across printed menus, digital menus, specials boards, and online platforms. Specials added during service that don't have documented allergen information are a frequent finding, particularly in smaller establishments.

**Pest Control & Premises Failures**

Structural and environmental issues that trigger improvement notices

24

Evidence of pest activity with no pest control in place

Critical

Droppings, gnaw marks, or a live pest seen by an EHO inspector is one of the most serious findings in any inspection and can result in immediate closure. The absence of a contracted pest control service significantly worsens the regulatory response.

25

Premises in poor repair — cracked surfaces, damaged walls, broken equipment

Common

Cracked tiles, damaged sealant, peeling paint, or broken equipment in food preparation areas are noted in virtually every inspection report. Surfaces that cannot be properly cleaned are non-compliant regardless of how often they are cleaned. A maintenance schedule is as important as a cleaning schedule.

How many of these apply to your business? If even a handful of these failures are present in your operation, you are at elevated risk of a poor EHO inspection outcome — and more importantly, at elevated risk of a food safety incident. The good news is that most of these failures are addressable quickly, with the right guidance and documentation in place. A pre-inspection review by a qualified food safety consultant typically identifies and resolves the majority of issues within a few weeks.

How many of these failures exist in your kitchen?

Beacon's food safety consultants can carry out a full pre-inspection review of your premises — identifying gaps, updating your HACCP documentation, and working with your team to address every item before an EHO visits.

[Book a Free Consultation](#)