



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

GHP – SECTION 6

PERSONAL HYGIENE

FAO Good Hygiene Practices (GHP) and
Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point
(HACCP) Toolbox for Food Safety

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Technical note for readers

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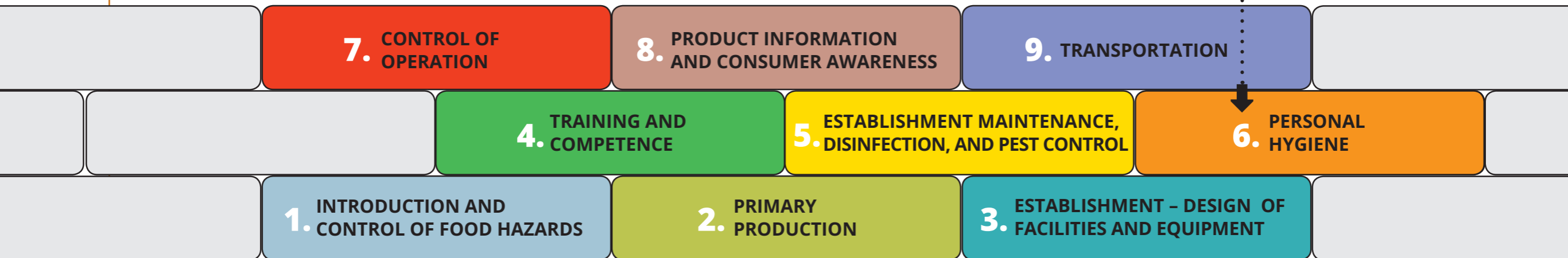
PERSONAL HYGIENE

SCOPE AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

This guidance document is part of a toolbox of materials and has been developed to provide users with a good understanding of Section 6, Personal Hygiene of the Codex General Principle of Food Hygiene (CXC 1-1969).

Effective and well-established Good Hygiene Practices provide the foundation for food safety management systems. This tool divides the practices into nine sections, as illustrated by the brick schematic below. The section addressed by the current guidance document is indicated by the arrow.

You are here



CONTEXT

Personnel who do not maintain the appropriate degree of personal cleanliness, who have certain illnesses or conditions or who behave inappropriately, can contaminate food and transmit illness to consumers.

Food businesses should establish policies and procedures for personal hygiene, ensure that all personnel are aware of the importance of good personal hygiene, and that they understand and comply with a set of practices designed to ensure food safety.

CONTEXT

Objectives

Personnel who do not maintain an appropriate degree of personal cleanliness, who have certain illnesses or conditions or who behave inappropriately, can contaminate food and transmit illness to consumers through food.

Learning objectives

This document provides guidance on:

- the importance of personal health and cleanliness for those entering or working in food handling areas;
- personal practices to prevent and reduce food contamination by food handlers; and
- how hands should be washed and how frequently to wash them.

CONTEXT

Codex definitions:

Contaminant: Any biological, chemical or physical agent, foreign matter or other substances not intentionally added to food that may compromise food safety or suitability.

Contamination: The introduction or occurrence of a contaminant in the food or food environment.

Food Handler: Any person who directly handles packaged or unpackaged food, equipment and utensils used for food, or surfaces that come into contact with food and that is expected, therefore, to comply with food hygiene requirements.

Food hygiene: All conditions and measures necessary to ensure the safety and suitability of food at all stages of the food chain.

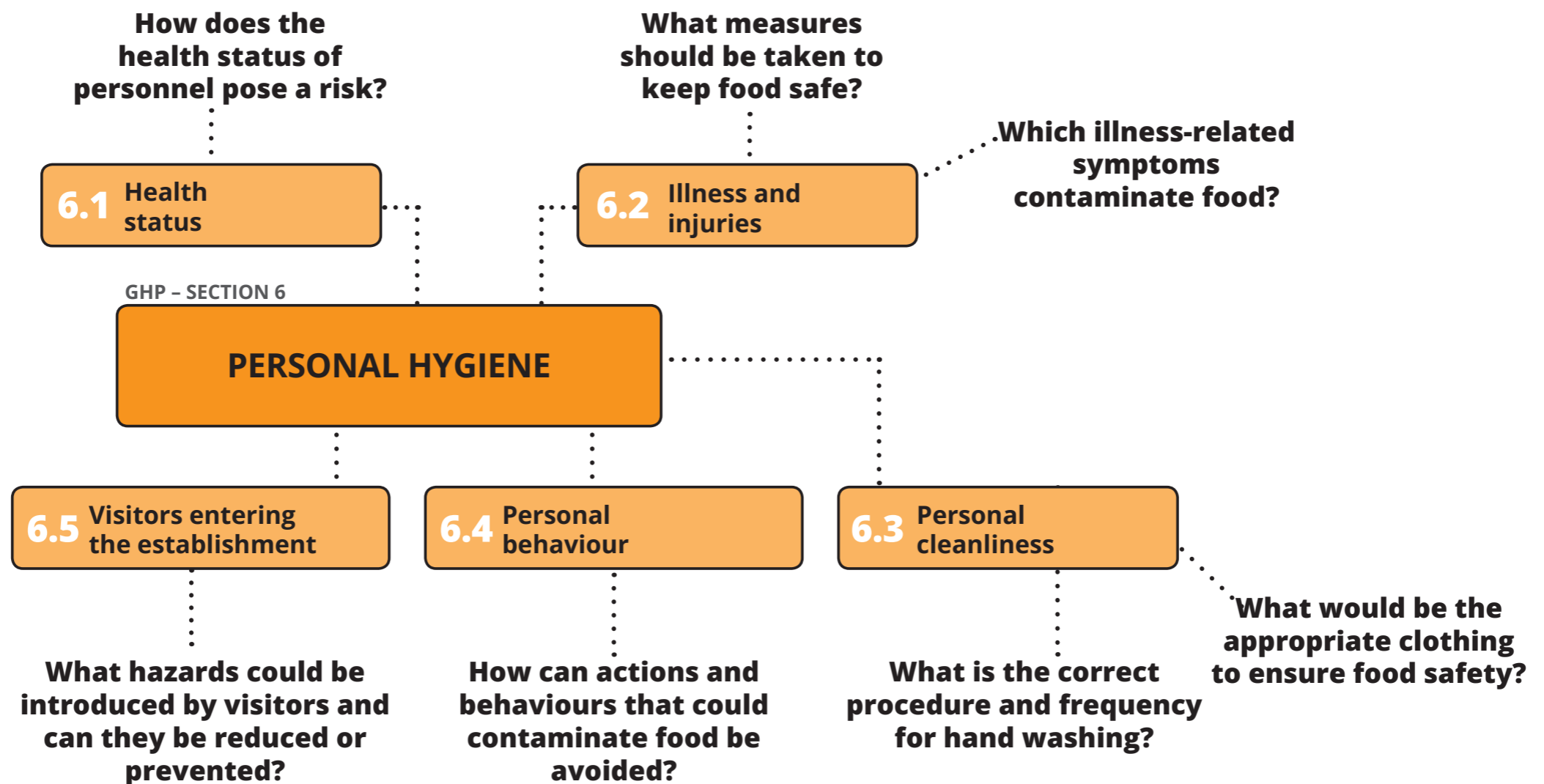
Food safety: Assurance that food will not cause adverse health effects to the consumer when it is prepared and/or eaten according to its intended use.

PERSONAL HYGIENE

MINDMAP

This section of the guidance is divided into sub-sections. You can jump to a particular sub-section by clicking on it, or return to this page at anytime by clicking on

PERSONAL HYGIENE



6.1 HEALTH STATUS

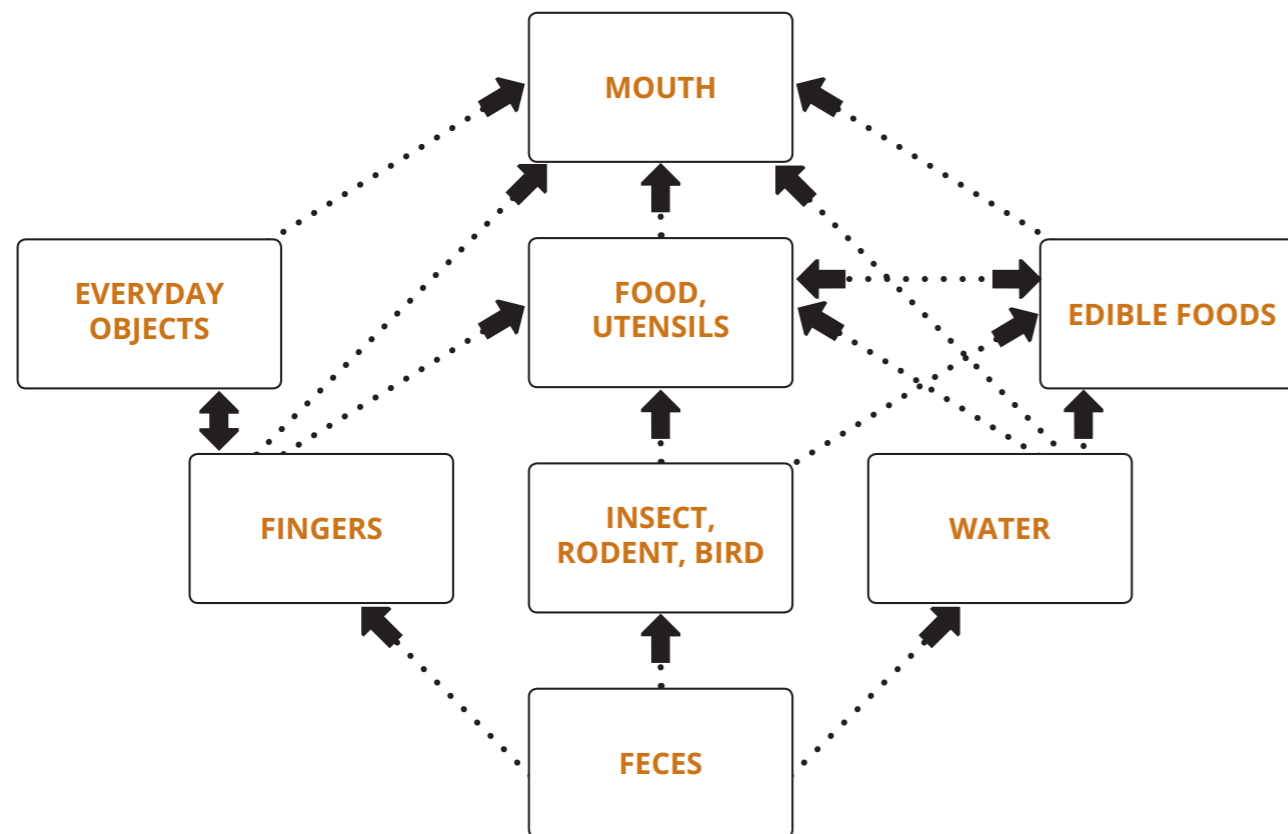
The health of personnel is important to consider as a potential hazard. People can carry a disease and contaminate food in food handling areas through different sources of contamination. Personnel who are known or suspected to be ill or carrying a disease likely to be transmitted through food should not enter any food handling areas. Personnel must report illness or symptoms to their supervisor. Training is required to help personnel understand the importance of reporting illness.

Sources of contamination

A person who is ill will start shedding microorganisms before their symptoms begin and continue after the symptoms stop. Therefore, food handlers who are sick increase the risk of food contamination, especially when they do not know that they are sick. For example, a person could carry pathogens such as Salmonella without presenting symptoms.

6.1 HEALTH STATUS

Fecal-oral route of infection



Infections occur easily when even one food handler fails to observe hand hygiene rules.

- The fecal-oral route is the primary route of infection for foodborne microorganisms.
- The human gastrointestinal tract excretes microorganisms some of them are potentially pathogenic.
- Wounds shed pathogenic microorganisms, and unprotected or uncovered bandages can also contaminate food.

6.1 HEALTH STATUS

FBO RESPONSIBILITIES



Topic	Examples of what you should do
Food handler health status	If possible, keep records on the health status of each food handler. This could include the worker's history of illness, visits to medical clinics, medical clearance and notes on activities where there is risk of acquiring infections.
Reporting illness	Encourage staff to report bouts of illness as part of a positive food safety culture.
Alternative duties	If workers are ill or could be carrying infectious agents, they should be assigned alternative duties that do not involve directly handling food.

6.2 ILLNESS AND INJURIES

From the first day of work in a food facility, food handlers should be aware that they could transmit illness. They should be encouraged to report to their employer any time they feel unwell.

Employers should be aware of all illness-related symptoms that could contaminate the food. They should implement measures to monitor the health of food handlers to avoid food contamination.

Illness-related symptoms that could contaminate food

Supervisors should ask personnel if they have any of the following symptoms:

- jaundice
- diarrhoea
- vomiting
- discharge from the ear, eye or nose
- fever
- sore throat with fever
- infected skin lesions

TIP

Consider using brightly coloured or metal detectable bandages, as skin colour bandages could get lost in products.



6.2 ILLNESS AND INJURIES

FBO RESPONSIBILITIES



Topic	Examples of what you should do
Illness and injuries	Train staff on how to recognize symptoms of illness, cuts and wounds along with the corrective actions.
Alternative duties	If workers are ill or are suspected of carrying infectious agents, they should be assigned alternative duties that do not involve directly handling food.
First aid supplies	First aid kits should be available with waterproof and metal-detectable bandages and plasters that come in colours that contrast with the food product.

6.3 PERSONAL CLEANLINESS

People can shed microorganisms that are present:

- on the skin
- in the nose
- in the mouth
- under the nails
- on hair including beards and mustaches

Personal cleanliness is key to preventing contamination from food handlers. To prevent cross-contamination, personnel working in food processing and handling environments should:

- ➔ maintain a high degree of personal cleanliness;
- ➔ wash their hands appropriately and frequently, even if wearing gloves; and
- ➔ wear suitable protective clothing, head and beard coverings, and footwear.

Personnel need the appropriate facilities (changing rooms, washrooms, hand washing stations, etc.) to achieve and maintain the required level of hygiene.

6.3 PERSONAL CLEANLINESS

Hand washing

Washing hands is the most important method for preventing food poisoning. If a worker's hands are contaminated they can pass the contamination directly on to the food products. Therefore, it is important to consider the elements required to prevent contamination, such as the correct procedure for washing hands, and frequency.

Effective hand wash requires three elements:

- running potable water,
- soap, and
- something to dry hands with.



How to properly wash your hands

- 1 Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), and apply soap.
- 2 Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap.
Lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- 3 Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds.
- 4 Rinse your hands well under clean, running water.
- 5 Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

6.3 PERSONAL CLEANLINESS

Hand washing: Frequency

Hands need to be washed regularly and immediately:

- before working with food;
- after using the toilet;
- after handling rubbish/waste;
- after smoking, coughing, sneezing, using a tissue, eating or drinking;
- after touching hair, scalp or mouth; and
- before the worker starts working with a different food product, to prevent cross contamination.



TIPS

In addition to the points mentioned above, hand washing frequency should be appropriate to the risk of contamination associated with the food. Hands should be washed more often when handling food with a high risk of contamination.

6.3 PERSONAL CLEANLINESS



Things to consider

- Everyone who enters a food handling area must wash their hands properly;
- hands should be double washed after using the toilet and before entering the food handling areas;
- hands should be washed before putting on gloves;
- change gloves as often as you would wash your hands;
- wash reusable gloves as often as you would wash your hands; and
- wash hands before starting a different task.

6.3 PERSONAL CLEANLINESS

In cases where there is no access to clean water or soap, personnel may use **hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol.**

In cases where there is no access to soap or hand sanitizer, **rub hands under water and dry them.**

➔ **Hand sanitizers should not replace handwashing and should not be used if hands are visibly dirty or greasy.**

6.3 PERSONAL CLEANLINESS

Suitable protective clothing

A special and clean dress code is required for everyone who enters a food-handling area including:

- food handlers
- visitors
- management
- contractors
- auditors

The dress code could include:

clean protective clothing, clean shoes, hair covering, beard covering, gloves and no jewelry (including wrist watches).



Things to consider

- ensure that working clothes are clean;
- provide clothes made of light colours that will show if they are not clean;
- avoid visible zippers, since they could be a source of contamination; and
- avoid visible buttons, since they could be a physical hazard.

PERSONAL HYGIENE

6.3 PERSONAL CLEANLINESS

FBO RESPONSIBILITIES



Topic	Examples of what you should do
Protective equipment	Provide food workers with garments that they can change into before entering the food handling area. Provide gloves, hairnets, beard nets and shoe/boot covers for workers as they enter the food handling areas.
Hand washing and gloves	Keep training records for handwashing and for glove use along with any infractions of the rules to assess whether re-training is required.
Signage	Ensure that there is adequate signage to re-enforce handwashing and glove use.

6.4 PERSONAL BEHAVIOUR

Establishing a food safety culture is key. Food handlers should be aware of the importance of their behaviour inside a food facility as well as the effects of not following guidelines on food contamination. Training on safe behaviour is required, its effectiveness should be reviewed and training materials should be adjusted when necessary.

Behaviour inside a food facility

Food handlers must understand the importance of behaving appropriately in order to avoid food contamination. **Food handlers should be aware of what is not allowed inside food facilities.** For example, there must be no:

- spitting;
- chewing gum, eating or drinking;
- touching the mouth, nose, hair or other places of possible contamination; and
- sneezing or coughing over unprotected food.

➔ **Personnel should not wear jewelry, carry cellphones or other items that could contaminate the food handling area.**

6.4 PERSONAL BEHAVIOUR



Things to consider

- Controlled access to personnel could help to reduce cross contamination between areas.
- Install visible signage to remind personnel of the appropriate behaviour of food handlers inside food processing areas.
- Provide appropriate facilities to store personal items so that personnel will not bring jewellery or other items into the food handling areas.

6.4 PERSONAL BEHAVIOUR

Food hygiene training

Training is important but it is most important to ensure that personnel understand the consequences of improper personal hygiene to the wellbeing of the community and the consumer.

TIPS

- Frequent training will lead to high levels of personal hygiene.
- Everyone, even the supervisors has to adhere to the agreed-upon rules of personal hygiene.
- A personal thank-you from a supervisor to acknowledge correct behaviour works wonders.



6.5 VISITORS ENTERING THE ESTABLISHMENT

Visitors and other persons from outside the establishment

Non-personnel, such as visitors, clients or maintenance workers, should:

- be instructed on and adhere to the personal hygiene directives prior to entering the food manufacturing, processing, and handling areas, including reporting any illnesses or injuries;
- be supervised, when necessary; and
- wear protective clothing.

TIP

Hairnets and coats for visitors are best made available at the entrance to production areas.



6.5 VISITORS ENTERING THE ESTABLISHMENT

Personal hygiene documents and records



All **personal hygiene directives** should be documented and actively communicated to staff, contractors and visitors. It is important to monitor and maintain records to support continuous improvement, and to implement changes and updates when necessary.



Things to consider

- Keep personal hygiene directives short and concise.
- Review and implement changes to directives when necessary and communicate any updates to personnel, contractors and visitors.
- Provide training and retraining to personnel.

6.5 VISITORS ENTERING THE ESTABLISHMENT



Documentation must be maintained to demonstrate that personal conduct and hygiene directives are being followed.

- Keep records of all employees who have received the hygiene directive and/or training.
- Keep a monitoring log of personal conduct and hygiene directives. Verify these activities frequently and include details such as date, time, person responsible, deviations and corrective actions.
- Keep a log of visitors, which should include the visitor's name, date and time, reason for visiting, person they are visiting, and a signature confirming that they are aware of the rules for personal conduct and of the hygiene requirements.

6.5 VISITORS ENTERING THE ESTABLISHMENT

Manager commitment to personal hygiene

Without adequate facilities, personnel will not be able to achieve the recommended levels of personal hygiene. Food business operators are responsible for providing the finances and clear guidance necessary to create a food safety culture, and should provide:

- hair coverings and coats;
- clean changing rooms, toilets and handwashing facilities; and
- clean and adequate washroom facilities.

PERSONAL HYGIENE

6.5 VISITORS ENTERING THE ESTABLISHMENT

FBO RESPONSIBILITIES



Topic

Examples of what you should do

Provide secure facilities

Provide lockers or other secure areas where personnel can leave items such as jewellery, watches, etc. while working in the food processing/ preparation area.

Enforce positive personal behaviours

Provide easy to understand visuals in high traffic areas to remind personelle of appropriate behaviour in food production areas (e.g. hand washing techniques, proper use of protective equipment). Consider when re-training is required.

FIND OUT MORE



For additional information on the following topics related to this section, please consult the **Further reading** section accessible from the [SECTION LANDING PAGE](#).

What actions should be taken if a food handler is ill, or is suspected of being ill?

What are the possible symptoms exhibited by people who have infectious diseases?

How can food workers with cuts and wounds handle food safely?

When and how should food handlers wash their hands?

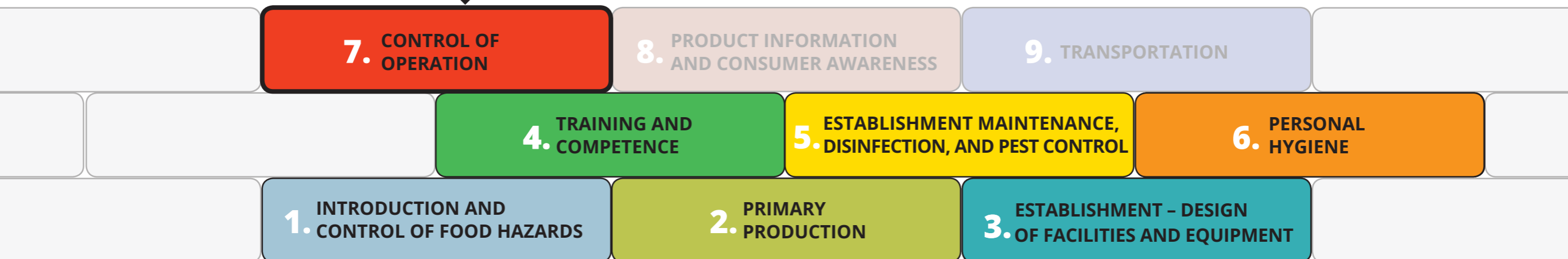
How to recognize and change bad behaviours in a food handling environment?

What are the appropriate practice and procedures to guard against hazards being introduced by visitors to the FBO?

KEEP READING

The next section of the GHP toolbox is Control of operation.
To continue reading, click on the highlighted brick below.

Click here for the
next section



FEEDBACK ON THIS GUIDANCE MATERIAL IS ALWAYS WELCOMED!

Please contact us at: food-quality@fao.org

KEEP READING

GHP and HACCP Toolbox for Food Safety

www.fao.org/good-hygiene-practices-haccp-toolbox

FOOD SYSTEMS AND FOOD SAFETY –
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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