

Own-check sampling in serving establishments

Serving establishments that carry out the processing of unpacked, perishable foodstuffs, the production of foodstuffs and/or the production of ice must incorporate sampling and testing into their own-check system. Serving establishments can carry out own-check sampling in-house or by establishing an agreement with an approved laboratory (listed in Finnish at <https://www.ruokavirasto.fi/laboratoriopalvelut/ruokaviraston-hyvaksymat-laboratoriot/elintarvikelaboratoriot/>). The sampling plans and the implementation thereof of serving establishments are assessed by an inspector in connection with Oiva inspections. Any changes in the numbers of samples taken must be agreed upon with an inspector.

Provisions on the obligation of the manufacturers of food products to carry out own-check sampling are provided in the EU Regulation on the Microbiological Criteria for Foodstuffs. The Finnish Food Authority has prepared a guide on the microbiological requirements for food products and the application of the Commission Regulation (4095/04.02.00.01/2020/3). The guide is available (in Finnish) on the Finnish Food Authority's website at https://www.ruokavirasto.fi/globalassets/tietoa-meista/asiointi/oppaat-ja-lomakkeet/yritykset/elintarvikeala/elintarvikealan-oppaat/elintarvikkeiden-mikrobiologiset-vaatimukset_ohjeita-toimijoille.pdf and the appendix concerning serving establishments is available at <https://www.ruokavirasto.fi/globalassets/tietoa-meista/asiointi/oppaat-ja-lomakkeet/yritykset/elintarvikeala/elintarvikealan-oppaat/liite-9-vahittaismyyntipaikka.pdf>

Operators may also be subject to other sampling requirements in addition to the ones detailed in these instructions. For example, serving establishments and institutional catering establishments that produce packaged foodstuffs for sale may be required to carry out durability testing.

Ice testing

If the serving establishment produces ice for use in drinks or ready-to-eat foods, **the quality of the ice must be tested once a year**. Ice samples are tested for *Escherichia coli*, coliform bacteria and intestinal enterococci.

Surface sampling

Serving establishments that handle or produce ready-to-eat, perishable foodstuffs, such as salads, filled sandwiches, lightly salted fish or cold cuts, must carry out surface sampling. This obligation applies to restaurants, cafés, pizzerias, sushi restaurants, catering services and institutional kitchens, for example. The numbers of surface cleanliness samples that need to be collected depend on the scope of operations. The sampling frequencies, numbers of samples and analyses of serving establishments are detailed in the table below.

Table: Numbers of surface cleanliness samples, sampling frequencies and analyses in serving establishments that handle raw, perishable foodstuffs.

	Serving establishments 0–500 dishes/day	Serving establishments 500–2,000 dishes/day	Serving establishments over 2,000 dishes/day
Sampling frequency and number of samples	- Sampling must be carried out at least four times a year - At least five sample units are to be collected in each sampling session	- Sampling must be carried out at least eight times a year - At least five sample units are to be collected in each sampling session	- Sampling must be carried out at least 12 times a year - At least five sample units are to be collected in each sampling session
Analyses to be performed	Aerobic microorganisms or enterobacteria	Aerobic microorganisms or enterobacteria	Aerobic microorganisms or enterobacteria

The samples can be collected in-house using Hygicult dipslides or other similar commercial indicators/methods intended for cleanliness monitoring or by a laboratory. The surface cleanliness samples must be collected from surfaces that come into direct contact with foodstuffs, such as worktops, cutting boards, tools and machines (vegetable shredders, etc.). The samples must be collected from clean and dry surfaces, e.g. in the morning before starting work. If the sampling is carried out in-house, the instructions for the method used must be followed.

Serving establishments that produce perishable ready-to-eat foodstuffs that are able to support the growth of *Listeria monocytogenes* and have a shelf-life of five days or longer must also collect surface samples for *Listeria monocytogenes* testing. Such foodstuffs include fresh salads, filled sandwiches, lightly salted fish and cold-smoked fish. The surface samples must be collected during work or immediately after work and before cleaning from areas and devices used to handle the aforementioned foodstuffs.

Food sampling

Serving establishments must collect samples from any perishable foodstuffs and ready-to-eat foods that they produce that are able to support the growth of *Listeria monocytogenes* and have a **shelf-life of 5 days or longer** for microbiological testing.

Minced meat and meat preparations made from beef or lamb are recommended to be tested for STEC bacteria, at the operator's discretion (purpose of use, target group). As an example, sampling is recommended when producing minced meat that is intended to be eaten uncooked (e.g. steak tartare) or when the minced meat produced at a restaurant is used to make hamburgers to be cooked to medium. Hamburgers to be cooked to medium should also be tested for e.coli and salmonella, when necessary.

For suspected cases of food poisoning, production kitchens should collect a 200–300 g sample/batch from each dish or foodstuff prepared. The samples should be collected aseptically in sampling containers or factory-clean plastic bags (but not in biodegradable bags). The samples should be frozen and stored in a freezer for at least 2–4 weeks. The sampling will make it easier to investigate suspected cases of food poisoning later if the food in question is suspected of being the cause. Similar samples should also be collected from prepared salads, grated vegetables, etc. Combining multiple foods to form a single sample is not recommended.

Results monitoring

As part of their own-check system, the operator must prepare a sampling plan that defines the samples to be collected, the tests conducted on the samples and the sampling frequency. The operator must keep records of test results, the corrective measures carried out in response to poor test results (such as more intensive cleaning/improved instructions/changing of detergents/changing of cleaning equipment) and the results of repeat samples.

The operator must analyse the development of test results over the long term (trend analysis). Trend analysis helps assess whether the production process and hygiene measures are under control. This examination must be performed on an analysis-specific basis. In the event that a trend is declining, the operator must take immediate measures to prevent microbiological hazards. If a trend has remained satisfactory for a long time, the sampling frequency can be reduced. At its simplest, trend analysis can be carried out by recording test results in a table in a notebook that shows how the results are trending.

Examples of trend analysis:

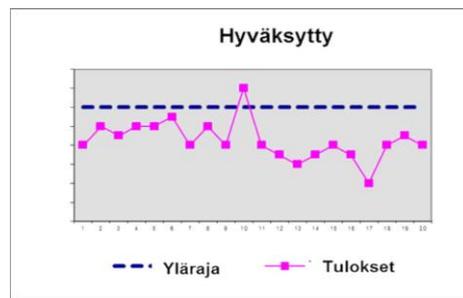


Figure 1. The situation is satisfactory in the context of an indicator. More often than not, the situation requires measures in the event of a pathogen.

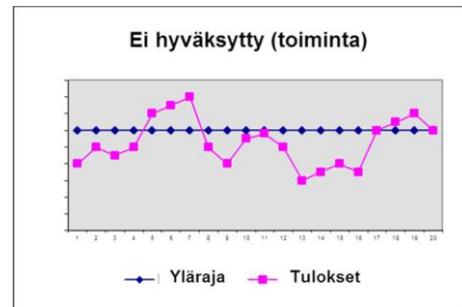


Figure 2. The situation is unsatisfactory. There is a recurring problem in the operations of the food premises.

Durability testing

Operators must ensure that their foodstuffs meet microbiological, chemical and organoleptic requirements until the end of their shelf-life.

In the event that perishable foodstuffs are stored for several days after manufacture, processing or opening of the package, the operator must assess in advance how long the foodstuff can be stored. Examples of this kind of storage include storing a finished food product or a cold side for later serving, or storing a half-finished food item (such as sauce base) for the later preparation of the full meal. The assessment can be based on general knowledge (e.g. when a cooked product is stored in an opened package for a short period of time). It can also be an organoleptic assessment made by the operator in corresponding conditions to ensure product quality at the end of the planned period of usability.

In the context of long storage periods, it may also be necessary to examine durability through laboratory tests. For example, for foods prepared by means of heating, four days is usually regarded as a long storage period. However, it is advisable to plan the operations in such a way that opened packages, half-finished foods or fully-prepared foods are not stored for long periods of time.

Further information from Food Control:

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