

General Hygiene Guidelines on Sushi and Sashimi Restaurants and Similar Establishments

Objective:

To offer hygiene guidelines for individuals working in Japanese restaurants or similar establishments and advise the trade on how to minimise the microbiological hazards during the preparation/handling of sushi and sashimi.

Scope of Application:

Sushi and sashimi restaurants and other similar establishments.

Definition:

1. “Sashimi” is an umbrella term for food consisting of fillets of marine fish, molluscs, crustaceans, fish roe and other seafood to be eaten in its raw state.
2. “Sushi” refers to food consisting of cooked and pressed rice flavoured with rice vinegar and mixed with other food ingredients placed on top/in the middle of the rice balls. It may or may not be wrapped in seaweed and is usually served in small pieces. The ingredients used include raw/cooked or vinegared seafood, roe of marine fish or shellfish, vegetables and cooked meat or eggs.

Main Steps to Take During Preparation:

The preparation/handling of sushi and sashimi can be divided into four main steps: purchase, storage, preparation, delivery and display.

1. Purchase

- 1) Purchase seafood and other ingredients from reputable stores with good hygiene conditions;
- 2) Purchase ingredients including seafood according to the actual amount needed;
- 3) Do not use freshwater aquatic products (e.g. freshwater fish, freshwater shrimp and freshwater crabs) as ingredients for sashimi;
- 4) Receiving deliveries:
 - Check relevant documents, such as the hygiene certificate issued by competent authorities in the place of origin;
 - Check if the refrigerated vehicle is clean and hygienic, with a

temperature of below 5°C;

- Check if the freezer vehicle is clean and hygienic, with a temperature of -18°C or below;
- Examine the freshness of all ingredients, especially seafood. Packages of frozen food items should be free of frost. Reject deliveries of ingredients if spoilage or other abnormal organoleptic characteristics are detected;
- Store the goods at an appropriate temperature immediately after receipt;
- Keep the purchase and sales records or relevant receipts to enable the competent authorities to trace the source of the goods when necessary.

2. Storage

1) Make sure food items are stored in the most suitable way.

- Store ingredients that need to be frozen or chilled in separate refrigerators or the designated compartments in a refrigerator;
- Store frozen food at -18°C or below until one day before food preparation;
- Defrost an adequate amount of frozen ingredients in a refrigerator one day before food preparation. The temperature for defrosting in the refrigerator should be set between 0°C and 5°C, and the ingredients should be used within 48 hours;
- It is necessary to check the temperature of the refrigerator/freezer every day and keep all the records;
- Uncooked ingredients must be stored separately from prepared/ready-to-eat food to avoid cross-contamination;
- The containers in which the prepared food is placed when stored in the refrigerator must be clean and hygienic;
- Prepared sushi and sashimi must be properly covered and stored in a dedicated refrigerator with a temperature below 5°C. Do not store any other food items in the refrigerator to avoid cross-contamination.

2) Make sure to use fresh seafood.

- Do not stock excessive amounts of seafood;
- Follow the “first in, first out” principle for stock rotation.

3. Preparation

Food producers and operators should ensure that the fish served raw undergoes specific freezing treatment to kill any possible parasites, such as freezing it at -20°C or below for seven days or at -35°C for approximately 20 hours.

- Plan in advance the amount of ingredients needed and the timing to avoid excessive or premature preparation that may result in a waste of ingredients or prolonged storage;
- Keep the preparation time as short as possible and avoid leaving cooked rice, sashimi or other ingredients at a temperature between 5°C and 60°C for over two hours;
- Place cooked rice in a lidded container and store it separately from raw food;
- Add an appropriate amount of vinegar to the sushi rice as soon as possible after it is cooked to bring the pH value down to 4.6 or below¹;
- Use separate utensils to handle raw and cooked food.

4. Delivery and Display

- Effective measures should be taken to prevent contamination of sushi/sashimi before consumption. The food can be put on properly covered dishes or wrapped with cling film and packed in plastic boxes; sashimi should be stored in edible ice, separated with food-grade cling film;
- Prepared sushi and sashimi must be kept below 5°C during delivery and display, and it is necessary to minimise the duration between delivery/display and consumption;
- The shelf life of pre-packed sushi/sashimi should be labelled;
- When sold in self-service sushi restaurants, sushi/sashimi should be properly protected and stored at a suitable temperature (below 5°C). Clean tongs and trays (baskets) should be available for customers to pick up food

¹ Adding an appropriate amount of vinegar to cooked rice to bring its pH value to 4.6 or below helps to inhibit the growth of microorganisms, especially *Bacillus cereus*. Food preparation staff can test the pH value in different areas of the sushi rice with a calibrated pH meter to ensure that the sushi rice is evenly acidified to 4.6 or below. Reference: Food Safety Authority of Ireland: “Safe Production of Sushi”.

items;

- Make sure the decorations on the dishes are clean and hygienic and do not use any decorations if there is doubt regarding their hygiene condition;
- Unsold sushi and sashimi that have been displayed on the day must be discarded before the business closes.

5. Personal Hygiene

- Wear a neat and clean work garment and cover your hair with a hat;
- Do not wear accessories, such as rings, bracelets and watches, and do not apply nail polish or wear false nails;
- Wash hands thoroughly in the correct manner before handling food;
- Wear disposable gloves or use machines to minimise direct contact with food;
- Staff members wearing gloves for food preparation should not handle other work at the same time;
- Change the gloves if they come into contact with unclean items or have been worn for over 30 minutes;
- Cover exposed wounds with waterproof dressing properly;
- Stop handling food if you have symptoms such as runny nose, diarrhoea, vomiting or fever.

6. Utensils, Equipment and Environmental Hygiene

- Prepare sushi and sashimi in a well-ventilated and separated working area to lower the risk of contamination;
- The food preparation area, along with the equipment, must be kept clean and hygienic;
- The work surfaces, chopping boards and knives should be kept clean and tidy and marked with a designated label to indicate they are exclusively used for preparation of sushi or sashimi;
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect all utensils before and after use to make sure they are clean and hygienic;
- Use lidded bins, and empty and disinfect them regularly;
- Defrost refrigerators regularly;
- Do not keep any pets in the business establishments.

7. Responsibilities of Food Producers and Operators

- Ensure the ingredients are obtained from safe sources;
- Keep the purchase and sales records or relevant receipts to enable competent authorities to trace the source of the goods when necessary;
- Ensure that the environment in the establishment is clean and hygienic;
- Ensure that staff members comply with appropriate food hygiene practices;
- Arrange pre-employment training on basic food safety and hygiene knowledge for staff members;
- Food producers and operators who provide raw or undercooked food products in their establishments should take the initiative to inform customers about relevant food risks² verbally or on the menu so that customers can make more conscious and reasonable choices with the knowledge about relevant food risks.

² Consuming raw or undercooked food may pose higher safety risks, especially for high-risk people such as pregnant women, infants, the elderly and immunocompromised individuals.