

Top 10 Food Safety Challenges

QUICK SERVICE RESTAURANTS



In an analysis of data from OnBrand360® covering nearly 90,000 food safety assessments from the first seven months of 2023, Steritech found that the most common food safety challenges in Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) are connected to the cleanliness and condition of facilities and surfaces that do not come in direct contact with food. This may be because QSRs continue to experience:



TRAINING GAPS



LABOR SHORTAGES



BUDGET LIMITATIONS

1 Cleanliness of nonfood-contact surfaces: 53,125 violations

PRIMARY DRIVERS:

Maintaining food safety extends beyond surfaces that directly contact food. Cleanliness of all surfaces matters due to the risk of pathogens and cross-contamination. Designate cleaning captains for specific zones. Prioritize high-touch spots like screens, cooler handles, and equipment knobs.

2 Condition of nonfood-contact surfaces: 48,695 violations

PRIMARY DRIVER:

Food safety hinges on the quality of all surfaces, even the less conspicuous ones such as rusty shelving, deteriorated freezer gaskets, broken knobs, and undersides of equipment. Rising two spots from 2022, the condition of nonfood-contact surfaces should be assessed through vigilant inspections prior to reuse.

NOTEWORTHY INCREASE IN 2023

3 General facility cleanliness: 27,411 violations

PRIMARY DRIVERS:

Food residue, dirt, grease, and other debris build-up on floors, walls, and ceilings aren't just a turn-off to customers, they also pose food contamination hazards. To prevent this, maintain logs and allocate staff duties for daily upkeep of food preparation zones, customer-facing areas, and bathrooms.

4 Cold holding: 25,070 violations

PRIMARY DRIVER:

Proper management of perishable foods rose five spots from 2022. The service line can be a hotspot for harmful pathogens. Regularly monitor the temperatures of foods like lettuce, tomatoes, and cheeses to prevent spoilage. Inhibit harmful pathogens by keeping perishables at or below 41°F and storing them in steel, pre-chilled, insulated containers.

NOTEWORTHY INCREASE IN 2023

5 General facility condition: 23,588 violations

PRIMARY DRIVER:

Advancing five spots since 2022, the general upkeep of facilities has declined. Damaged zones, such as missing grout and rusted vents can impede cleaning, attract pests, and escalate contamination risks. Pro tip: Refrain from pressure washing, which can cause and exacerbate some of these issues.

NOTEWORTHY INCREASE IN 2023

6 Condition of food-contact surfaces: 20,327 violations

PRIMARY DRIVER:

Over time, food-contact surfaces such as cutting boards, fryer baskets, and knife blades deteriorate with use; this impedes thorough cleaning, poses cross-contamination risks, and creates physical hazards. Pro tip: maintain a list of items as they wear down and a structured timeline for replacement.

7 Cleanliness of food-contact surfaces: 17,564 violations

PRIMARY DRIVERS:

Cited in 2022 as one of the top three concerns among QSRs, it's clear that the cleanliness of surfaces that come in direct contact with food are being better prioritized; however, commonly overlooked tools and equipment like ice machines, fountain beverage nozzles, ice scoops, tongs, slicer blades, and dicers continue to pose challenges.

8 Date marking: 17,042 violations

PRIMARY DRIVER:

Date marking is an increasing concern, rising into the top 10 this year. Failure to properly mark preparation and storage dates can result in the use of spoiled foods that harbor pathogens. Establish procedures that ensure dates are consistently recorded.

NEW IN 2023

9 Sanitizing (non-dish machine): 13,040 violations

PRIMARY DRIVER:

Sanitizer buckets are an essential part of cleaning, but can pose food safety risks if not maintained. Regularly change sanitizer solution and educate employees on the proper use of sanitizer test strips and concentration levels.

NEW IN 2023

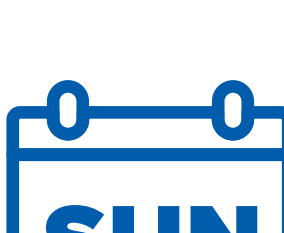
10 Wiping cloth storage: 11,522 violations

PRIMARY DRIVER:

Wiping cloths aid in disinfection with sanitizer solutions, but like sanitizer, they must be regularly replaced after rinsing surfaces or removing debris. Disposable cloths can help make this easier and more time-efficient.

NEW IN 2023

Could training enhancements improve your bottom line?



Sundays are shown to have the least amount of food safety violations on average



Breakfast daypart has 23% more food safety violations than lunch and dinner combined.*

*Per assessment at QSR establishments

Q4

had a 9% lower rate of food safety violations per assessment than the annual average in QSR restaurants