

Physical Hazards

A physical hazard is any object that accidentally gets into food.

Some physical hazards are foreign materials unintentionally introduced to food products (ex: metal fragments in ground meat, stones, hair, fingernails). Other physical hazards are naturally occurring objects (ex: bones in fish) that are hazardous to the consumer.

A physical hazard can contaminate a food product at any stage of production from the farm to the fork. Retail food establishments should take adequate measures to avoid physical hazards in food.

Risk of physical hazards can cause mild to severe injuries.

- The hardness, shape and sharpness of the object can affect the risk level
- Hard or sharp objects can cause cuts to the mouth or throat, damage to the intestines, damage to the teeth and gums, or choking
- Heat is also a physical hazard and can cause scalds and burns
- The presence of physical hazards in manufactured food can trigger a food recall
- Unwanted objects in food can lead to choking, broken teeth, cuts, and lacerations and damage the reputation of the establishment

Common sources of physical hazards:

- **Food handlers:** hair, nails, jewellery, bandages
- **Glass:** light bulbs, glass drinkware and glass food containers
- **Metal:** fragments from equipment (splinters, blades, needles, utensils), staples, nails, tools, etc.
- **Plastics:** material used for packaging; fragments of utensils used for cleaning equipment
- **Stones:** introduced during harvesting in foods such as rice, legumes, peas and beans
- **Wood:** splinters from wood structures and wooden pallets used to store or transport ingredients or food products
- **Natural components of food:** inedible parts such as fruit pits, shells, bones, hair
- **Others:** dust, dirt

Best practices to control and prevent physical hazards:

- Purchase materials and raw ingredients from reputable suppliers that effectively control physical hazards to prevent the entry of these hazards into your food establishment
- Follow personal hygiene rules to prevent physical hazards from food handlers. Keep hair tied back or use a hairnet. Keep fingernails short and trimmed. Use brightly coloured bandages to cover wounds. Avoid false fingernails, fake eyelashes and jewelry in food preparation areas
- Maintain regular kitchen cleaning and pest control routines
- Train employees to be alert and control physical hazards on the job. Keep all food covered
- Store small utensils, equipment, parts and spares in designated areas away from or below food, ingredients, packaging and food contact surfaces
- Maintain equipment in good repair to avoid hazards from worn-out equipment. Do not use, repair or perform maintenance on equipment near open food
- Schedule equipment maintenance to avoid conflict with peak food preparation times. Ensure proper cleaning and removal of all tools and objects from food contact surfaces after maintenance
- Ensure protective light shields to prevent breakable light bulbs
- Locate flying insect traps, pest control traps and glue boards away from food preparation areas

The most effective control of physical hazards is prevention.