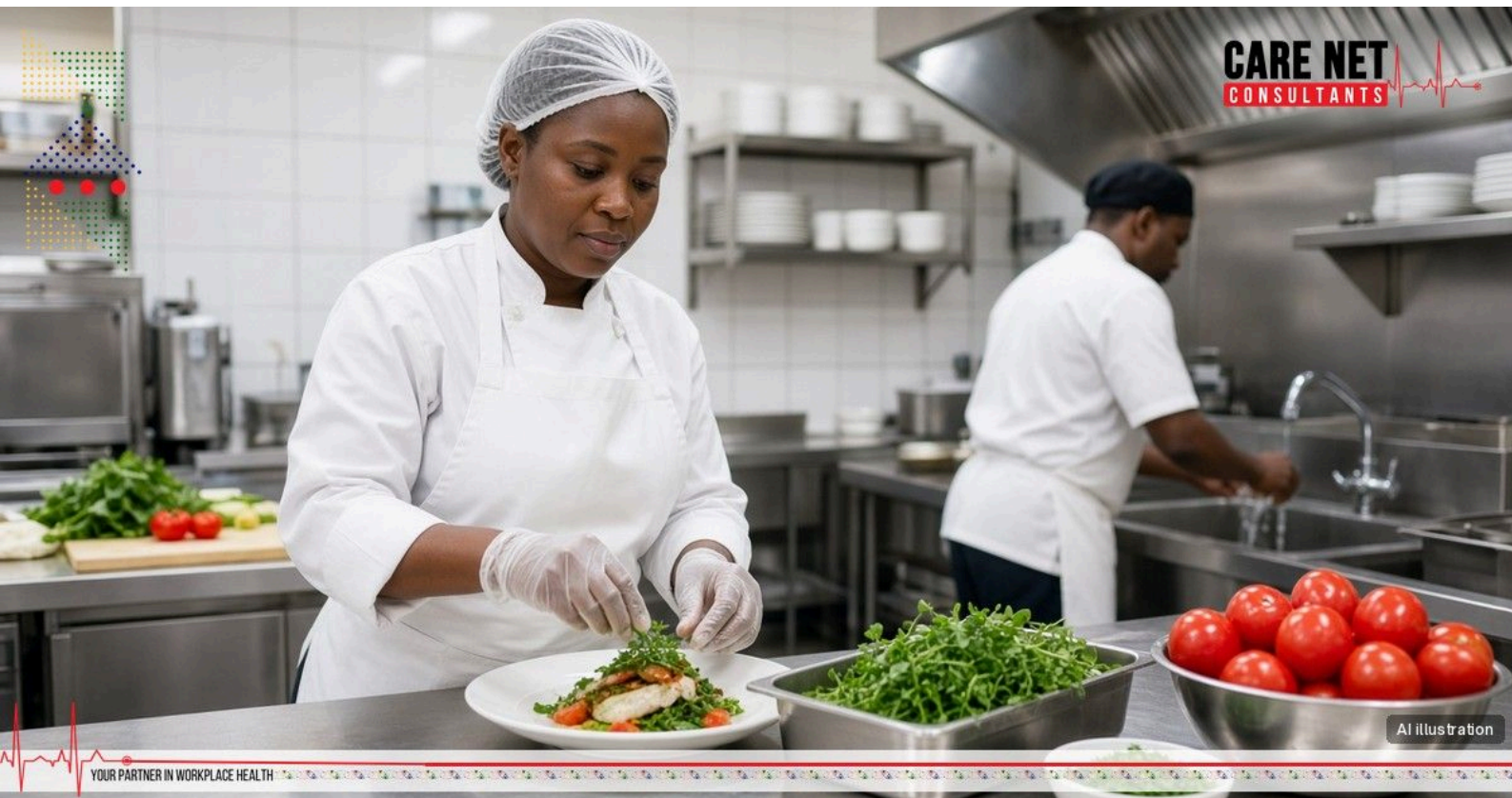


INDUSTRY HEALTH PACK

# FOOD HANDLING HEALTH PACK

R638, fit food handlers and safe cold rooms



In a kitchen or factory the law draws a clear line around sick food handlers, so a hesitant junior does not have to. This pack sets out R638, the medicals food businesses use to manage it, and the other exposures in food work, from cold rooms to flour dust.

# WHAT THE LAW ASKS OF YOU

These are the South African rules that matter most for a typical food handling employer. They are summarised from the regulations themselves; read the gazetted text for the full duties.

| LAW                                                                       | WHAT IT ASKS OF THE EMPLOYER                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>R638 of 22/06/2018 (GG 41730), regulation 11</b>                       | Food, a facility or a container must not be handled by a person with unclean hands or clothes, or with an uncovered infected sore, cut or abrasion. A person who has reported, or is suspected of, a contagious condition likely to be transmitted through food (such as jaundice, diarrhoea, vomiting, fever, sore throat with fever, or discharges from the ear, eye or nose) may only resume handling food after submitting a medical practitioner's certificate that they are fit to handle food. <sup>[1]</sup> |
| <b>R638, certificate of acceptability</b>                                 | Issued to the premises by the local authority, confirming the premises meet hygiene requirements. It is not a medical certificate for staff; you usually need both. <sup>[1]</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Physical Agents Regulations, 2024 (GN 5952, as amended by GN 7149)</b> | Cold stress in cold rooms and freezers, and heat in kitchens and bakeries: assess, control, train and monitor health where needed. <sup>[2,3]</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Noise Exposure Regulations, 2024 (GN 5953)</b>                         | Where workers may be at or above the 85 dBA limit on a processing line, a hearing conservation programme with baseline and follow-up audiometry. <sup>[4,5]</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Driven Machinery Regulations, 2015, regulation 18(11)</b>              | Forklift and reach truck operators must be trained for that type of machine. <sup>[6]</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>OHS Act 85 of 1993, section 8</b>                                      | A safe working environment without risk to health, as far as reasonably practicable. <sup>[7]</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

Numbers in red refer to the sources on the last page. This pack is general information, not legal or medical advice.

# THE MEDICALS YOUR TEAM NEEDS

Medical surveillance follows the exposure. Your risk assessment decides who is tested and for what, and your practitioner sets the programme. A typical food handling employer plans for three moments in a worker's career.

| WHEN                             | WHAT IT IS FOR                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Pre-employment (baseline)</b> | Before the person starts, or for chemical exposure immediately before or within 14 days of starting (HCA regulation 7). Sets the baseline that later results are compared with. <sup>[8,9]</sup>                 |
| <b>Periodic</b>                  | At the interval your risk assessment and occupational medicine practitioner set. For hazardous chemical agents, at intervals not exceeding two years unless the practitioner specifies otherwise. <sup>[8]</sup> |
| <b>Exit</b>                      | When the person leaves the job or the exposure. It closes the record and shows the worker's health at the end of exposure. <sup>[9]</sup>                                                                        |

## Tests and certificates to plan for

| TEST                        | NOTES                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Food handler medical</b> | Assesses fitness and the health requirements that support your hygiene duties under R638. <sup>[5]</sup> |
| <b>Return to work</b>       | A medical certificate of fitness to handle food after a contagious illness (reg 11). <sup>[1]</sup>      |
| <b>Audiometry</b>           | For processing lines at or above 85 dBA. <sup>[5]</sup>                                                  |
| <b>Operator medical</b>     | Vision, hearing and reaction for forklifts and reach trucks. <sup>[5]</sup>                              |
| <b>Spirometry</b>           | Where flour or other dusts are assessed as a risk, following the SATS guideline. <sup>[10]</sup>         |



### Planning medicals?

Tell us the headcount, the site and the exposures. A sales executive replies the same working day with a fixed-price proposal.<sup>[11]</sup>

#### Request a quote:

[carenetconsultants.co.za/forms/quote-request.html](https://carenetconsultants.co.za/forms/quote-request.html)

# THE MAIN RISKS, AND WHAT HELPS

Prevention starts at the source: remove or reduce the hazard first, then protect the person. Medicals check that the controls are working.

## Illness passed through food

A handler with a stomach bug can affect many customers.

**Prevention:** Clear reporting rule, no penalty for reporting, return only with a fitness certificate.

## Hand hygiene and skin

Cuts, sores and cracked hands.

**Prevention:** Handwashing stations, waterproof dressings, skin checks.

## Cold stress

Moving between hot bays and freezers.

**Prevention:** Insulated clothing, dry layers, warm breaks, time limits.

## Burns and cuts

Busy kitchens.

**Prevention:** Training, guards, first aid: cool water for 20 minutes for burns.

## Flour and dust

Bakeries and mills.

**Prevention:** Extraction, careful handling, spirometry where indicated.

## Noise and forklifts

Processing and cold store areas.

**Prevention:** Hearing protection, trained operators, marked walkways.



## For your notice board

Our World Food Safety Day poster is part of the free Care Net Health Awareness Pack, with posters for the South African health calendar in A4, A3 and A0.

[carenetconsultants.co.za/health-awareness-pack.html](http://carenetconsultants.co.za/health-awareness-pack.html)

# YOUR ONE-PAGE CHECKLIST

Print it, tick it, and file it with your risk assessment. Anything left unticked is your next action.

- ☐ Certificate of acceptability displayed for the premises
- ☐ Food handler medicals done for all handlers, including temporary staff
- ☐ Written rule: report vomiting, diarrhoea, fever or jaundice before shift
- ☐ Return to food handling only with a medical certificate of fitness
- ☐ Cuts and sores covered with waterproof dressings
- ☐ Handwashing stations stocked and working
- ☐ Cold room and freezer exposure assessed; warm break area provided
- ☐ Kitchen heat and burns risk assessed
- ☐ Noise on processing lines assessed; audiometry where at or above 85 dBA
- ☐ Forklift and reach truck operators trained and medically fit
- ☐ First aid kit and trained first aider on every shift
- ☐ Medical records stored confidentially (POPIA)
- ☐ Emergency numbers 10177 and 112 by the phone

Checked by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

FIVE-MINUTE TOOLBOX TALK

# WHEN TO STAY OFF THE LINE

Nobody likes letting the team down in a busy week. But one sick handler can make a lot of people ill. The rule is simple, and it protects you too.

1. Tell your supervisor before your shift if you have vomiting, diarrhoea, fever, jaundice, a sore throat with fever, or discharge from the ears, eyes or nose.
2. You will return to handling food once a doctor confirms you are fit. That is the law (R638 regulation 11).
3. Wash your hands properly: before work, after the toilet, after touching raw food, bins or your face.
4. Cover every cut or sore with a waterproof dressing.
5. In the freezer, change into dry layers. Damp clothes lose their warmth.
6. For a burn, cool water for twenty minutes, then call the first aider.

## Talk it through

- Who do we tell if we are sick?
- Are the handwashing stations stocked?
- Where are the blue plasters?

Ambulance from  
a landline

**10177**

Emergency from  
a cellphone

**112**

Save both numbers in your phone today. Know where the first aid kit is and who the first aider is on your shift.

Talk given by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ Number attending: \_\_\_\_

# HOW CARE NET CAN HELP

Food handler medicals at a clinic or on site, matched to R638 duties and your plant's noise, cold and machinery exposures. Every medical includes a risk-based exposure form and a review by an occupational health nursing practitioner, and is captured in My Clinic Online, our POPIA-aware record system.<sup>[12]</sup>

**4**

## fixed clinics

Walk-ins welcome. Busiest 8am to 2pm; afternoons are quieter. Saturdays for booked groups of more than 10.<sup>[13]</sup>

**16**

## mobile clinic units

From 10 employees on one site, Monday to Saturday. Most units carry inverters and battery packs.<sup>[11]</sup>

## Our fixed clinics

### Midrand

875 16th Road Midrand, Unit 2 Alphen Square  
North, Randjespark, Midrand, 1685  
+27 60 070 2723

### Elandsfontein

Cnr North Reef and Atlas Road, Shop 2 Delmond  
Centre, Elandsfontein, 1429  
+27 60 070 2723

### Brackenfell, Cape Town

Cnr Kruis and Capricorn Way, Unit 15 Reserve 1,  
Western Cape, 7560  
+27 60 070 2723

### Gqeberha

40 6th Avenue, Gqeberha, 6045  
+27 60 070 2723

## Get in touch

### Request a quote

[carenetconsultants.co.za/forms/quote-request.html](https://carenetconsultants.co.za/forms/quote-request.html)

A sales executive replies the same working day with a fixed-price proposal.<sup>[11]</sup>

### Book medicals

[carenetconsultants.co.za/forms/booking-request.html](https://carenetconsultants.co.za/forms/booking-request.html)

### Call or WhatsApp

+27 60 070 2723 | [wa.me/27600702723](https://wa.me/27600702723)

### Email

[salesdesk@carenetconsultants.co.za](mailto:salesdesk@carenetconsultants.co.za)

Ambulance from a  
landline

**10177**

Emergency from a  
cellphone

**112**

In a medical emergency call these first. Care Net clinics are not emergency services.

# SOURCES

Accessed October 2026. Legal summaries are drawn from the gazetted regulations on gov.za, labour.gov.za and health.gov.za, and from Acts Online. Health facts come from the named organisations. Care Net service details come from carenetconsultants.co.za.

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This pack is general information for employers. It is not legal or medical advice. Read the regulations for the full requirements, and speak to a qualified practitioner about individual health concerns. Worker medical information is special personal information under POPIA: keep it confidential and share fitness outcomes, not diagnoses.

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