

# Ensuring food health and safety compliance in South Africa

**F**ood safety and quality are paramount concerns for both consumers and businesses in the FMCG retail and wholesale industry. In South Africa, stringent regulations and legislations are in place to guarantee the safety and quality of food products. These include:

- **The Occupational Health and Safety Act** (Act No. 85 of 1993) provides for the health and safety of employees at work. This Act includes provisions for food safety in the workplace.
- **The Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act** (Act No. 54 of 1972) regulates the production, sale, and import of foodstuffs in South Africa, and includes provisions for food safety and hygiene.
- **The National Health Act** (Act No. 61 of 2003) provides for the regulation of health services in South Africa and includes provisions for the control of foodborne illnesses and diseases.
- **The Hazardous Chemical Substances Regulations** (Regulation No. R.1179 of 25 August 1995) provides for the management and control of hazardous chemical substances in the workplace, including those used in food production.
- **The Occupational Health and Safety Regulations** (Regulation No. R.847 of 25 May 2018) provides for the general health and safety of employees in the workplace, including provisions for food safety and hygiene.
- **The Food Hygiene Regulations** (Regulation No. R.962 of 23 July 2012) provides for the hygienic production, handling and disposal of food items.



Image courtesy of <https://www.aces.edu/>

## Protecting the health and well-being of customers and employees

Supermarkets play a critical role in upholding these standards, not only to protect the health of their customers, but also to ensure the well-being of their staff and employees. Rob De Vos, Executive for SPAR's South Rand Corporate Stores, says the company works closely with Government to ensure its regulatory requirements are always met.

"During and after the Covid-19 pandemic we made special efforts to build better relationships with the Departments of Health and Labour, inviting representatives to staff meetings

discussing health issues, and letting them walk the stores with our managers to give their opinions," says De Vos.

"In some instances where we had a rare Covid outbreak, we got great support from those representatives because they were part of our planning, and we continue to maintain those relationships even now."

## Maintaining health & safety compliance in retail and wholesale stores

Supermarkets and wholesalers must adhere to the legislation and regulations, which include proper food handling, storage, labelling, and hygiene practices.

First and foremost, staff training and education are crucial to maintaining compliance. Retailers and wholesalers should be investing in comprehensive training programmes to ensure that employees understand and follow food safety protocols.





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This training includes topics such as personal hygiene, cross-contamination prevention, safe food handling, and the importance of maintaining a clean and sanitary environment. Regular training sessions, refreshers, and assessments are conducted to reinforce these practices and keep employees informed about the latest developments in food safety.

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## Quality control and health and safety compliance

To guarantee the food safety and quality of every department and on every shelf, all retailers and wholesalers must implement robust quality control systems, otherwise they risk not being compliant. This involves conducting regular inspections and audits to identify potential hazards and ensure adherence to hygiene standards.

Regular monitoring of temperatures in refrigeration units and storage areas is essential to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria. Additionally, supermarkets and wholesalers need to enforce strict stock rotation practices to minimise the risk

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of expired or spoiled products reaching the shelves.

Moreover, stores should have well-established and effective cleaning and sanitation procedures to maintain a hygienic environment. Regular cleaning schedules covering all areas of the store, including floors, shelves, equipment, and restrooms are essential. These schedules outline the frequency of cleaning, the type of cleaning agents to be used, and the proper disposal of waste. By adhering to these procedures, stores can eliminate potential sources of contamination and create a safe environment for customers and employees alike.

## Beyond compliance: remembering the lessons of Covid

In recent times, the world has faced unprecedented challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In response to this crisis, supermarkets and

wholesalers took additional measures to enhance health and safety protocols.

The use of hand sanitisers and sanitising became commonplace in stores across South Africa. These measures provided an added layer of confidence for consumers and employees, significantly reducing the risk of virus and bacterial transmission.

Now that the pandemic is over, it's important that the lessons we learned aren't forgotten, and that at least some level of in-store personal sanitation is maintained.



Image courtesy of <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/>



Image courtesy of [www.who.int/](http://www.who.int/)

### The importance of hand hygiene

“The biggest threat to maintaining customer-facing sanitation services is cost prioritising, especially with franchise stores,” says Annette Devenish, Marketing Executive for hand and surface wipe manufacturer Sani-touch.

“Hygiene is one of the easiest things to cut back on, especially where there’s no return on investment for stores,” says Devenish. “Prior to Covid, sanitisers and wipes were not that common. Now there are so many, that consumers expect them for free. Money has to come from somewhere

because customers are not willing to pay.”

Devenish suggests hand sanitisers containing at least 60% alcohol should be strategically placed at entrances, near shopping carts, and throughout the store to encourage regular hand hygiene. Through visual reminders, customers are encouraged to sanitise their hands upon entry and exit, as well as before and after handling products.

Similarly, store employees should be required to frequently sanitise their hands, especially when handling cash, interacting with customers, or engaging in other high-contact activities. Hand hygiene in a store that sells food and grocery products cannot be over-emphasised.

At SPAR, sanitising wipes are provided to customers in certain sections, such as the fresh produce area or self-service counters. These wipes allow customers to sanitise surfaces, such as shopping cart handles or touchscreens before use.

“We can’t tell customers how to behave, but the way we behave in our stores sets the tone,” says

De Vos. “If we have sanitising habits entrenched in our operations, then our customers will follow suit, and I can already see that happening in the stores.”

The introduction of hand sanitisers and sanitising wipes serves not only as a preventive measure against the spread of viruses and bacteria, but also as a visible demonstration of a store’s commitment to customer health and safety. By implementing these additional measures, supermarkets and wholesalers communicate their dedication to upholding the highest health and safety standards, fostering trust and loyalty among consumers. **SR**



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