

## SELF-MONITORING SAMPLING AT SERVING PLACES

Serving places involved with unpacked, perishable foodstuffs, preparation of foodstuffs and/or preparation of ice, must include sampling and testing in its self-monitoring. Perishable foodstuffs are such foodstuffs where bacteria, which contaminate foodstuffs or cause food poisoning, can rapidly reproduce if the foodstuffs are not kept in proper temperature and conditions. Examples of these foodstuffs consist of, among others, meat, fish, chopped vegetables, as well as milk products.

The serving place can carry out the self-monitoring sampling by itself or make an agreement with an approved laboratory. The inspector will assess—in connection with Oiva inspection—the serving place's sampling plan as well as its implementation. Any changes in the number of samples must be agreed with the inspector.

The foodstuff producer's obligation to self-monitoring sampling is decreed in the EU's regulation on microbiological criteria for foodstuffs. The Finnish Food Authority has compiled instructions for applying the EU regulation on microbiological criteria for foodstuffs. The instructions are available on the Finnish Food Authority's website. The operator must also clarify whether it needs to, in its operations, conduct other tests—such as testing the quality of ice and water—in addition to the tests related to the quality and safety of foodstuffs, compliant with the EU regulation.

### Surface samples

Sampling in serving places is focused on surface samples. Surface samples shall be taken in serving places that handle or prepare ready-to-eat, perishable foodstuffs. The obligation applies to, among others, restaurants, cafés, catering services, and institutional kitchens. The number of surface samples depends on the extent of operations. Table 1 presents the serving places' sampling frequencies, numbers, and analyses made.

**Table 1. Surface samples, sampling frequencies, and analyses in serving places that handle or prepare ready-to-eat, perishable foodstuffs.**

Number of all foodstuffs prepared	Sampling place: Surfaces in direct contact with foodstuffs, equipment, countertops	Aerobic microbes or enterobacteria Recommended sampling frequency
< 1 500 portions/mo. < 50 portions/day	-	no sampling
1501–15 000 portions/mo. or <10 000 k/yr. 50–500 portions/day	5 samples in one go	2–4 times/yr.
15 001–60 000 portions/mo. or 10 000–100 000 k/yr. 500–2000 portions/day	5 samples in one go	6–8 times/yr.

Number of all foodstuffs prepared	Sampling place: Surfaces in direct contact with foodstuffs, equipment, countertops	Aerobic microbes or enterobacteria Recommended sampling frequency
>60 000 portions/mo. or >100 000 k /yr. > 2000 portions/day	5– 10 samples in one go	10–12 times/yr.

You can either take the samples yourself, for example, with the help of hygiene tests or other corresponding gauges meant for observing cleanness, or a laboratory can take the samples. Take the samples from processing platforms and equipment used for food production. You must take surface samples from all surfaces in direct contact with foodstuffs, such as countertops, cutting boards, and equipment (vegetable slicer, etc.). The samples shall be taken from clean and dry surfaces, for example, in the morning before beginning to work. If you take the samples by yourself, you must follow the instructions specified for the method used.

No recommended sampling frequencies have been determined for the following:

- serving chopped vegetables (salad bar)
- heating pre-cooked dishes
- selling scoop ice cream or frying point products
- handling pre-cooked foodstuffs, e.g., barbeque sausage or minced meat patties
- frying raw animal-based foodstuffs taken from the freezer, for example, minced meat patties
- making sandwiches with, for example, tomato/cucumber
- filling up bread rolls/baguettes with chopped raw materials.

Even though the above functions have no recommended sampling frequency, it is advisable to take surface samples to inspect the cleaning results.

## Listeria samples

Serving places must also take surface samples for *Listeria monocytogenes* tests if they prepare ready-to-eat or perishable foodstuffs where *Listeria monocytogenes* can grow and whose sales window is five (5) days or more. Examples of these foodstuffs consist of, among others, fresh-cut salads, sandwiches, cured fish, and cold-smoked fish. You will find more information on the Finnish Food Authority's application instructions.

## Foodstuff samples

Foodstuff samples are taken for microbiological tests in serving places that prepare perishable and ready-to-eat foodstuffs where *Listeria monocytogenes* can grow and whose **sales window is 5 (five) days or more, that is, the day of preparation and 4 days (1+4) or more**. Samples will not be taken from, for example, products whose sales window is at max. four (4) days or products where *L. monocytogenes* cannot grow, such as pickled goods, sauerkraut, marinated vegetables, jams and jellies, juices, soft drinks, dried fruits, as well as dried meat and fish products.

## Other foodstuff tests recommended for food safety

The operator must be familiar with the risks related to its operations and determine the tests required for ensuring food safety, as well as include them in its sampling and testing plan.

We recommend that minced meat and raw meat preparation made of beef or sheep be tested for

STEC bacteria upon consideration (purpose of use, target group). We recommend sampling, for example, when preparing minced meat that is meant to be eaten uncooked (for instance, steak tartare) or if medium-rare steaks made of minced meat prepared at the restaurant will be served. For example, *E.coli* and salmonella tests are recommended for medium-rare steaks.

## Ice testing

**If ice is prepared at the serving place, the quality of ice must be tested once a year. The best way to ensure the cleanness of ice is to take device-specific samples from the ice. The ice samples are tested for *Escherichia coli*, coliform bacteria, and intestinal enterococci.**

You can replace sampling of ice with another manner presented to the inspector. Examples include (all the conditions listed below must be fulfilled):

- the cleaning practices of the ice cube equipment have been described in self-monitoring and they are followed in operations
- the ice cube equipment and tools related to it look clean by visual inspection, and no faults can be detected
- good hygiene is applied to preparing and processing ice cubes, and
- surface samples are taken from the ice cube equipment, and their results are good.

In case of small-scale operations or if operations are not included in regular inspection, you must ensure frequent enough cleaning of the ice cube equipment and hygiene when preparing the ice. You are recommended to take surface samples from surfaces in contact with ice and from tools related to ice preparation.

## Food samples in case of suspected food poisoning

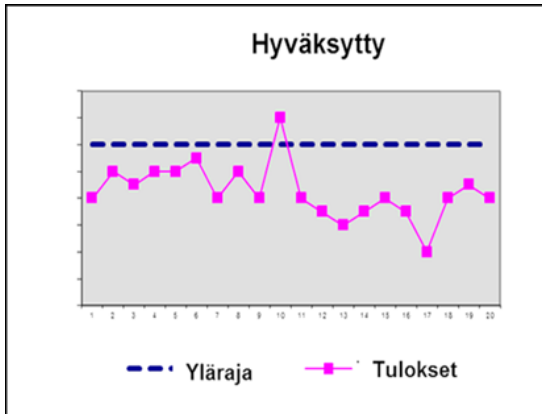
Commercial production kitchens are recommended to freeze food prepared in them and keep the food frozen for 2 - 4 weeks in case of potential food poisoning. A suitable sample amount is at least 200 grams. Combining different foods into one sample is not recommended.

## Follow-up of results

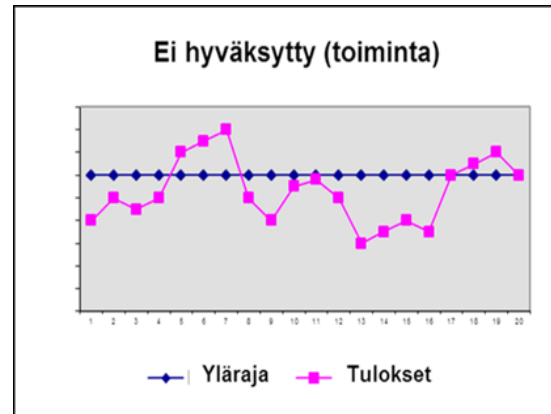
The operator must compile a sampling plan as part of its self-monitoring where the samples, tests made, and sampling frequencies are specified. The operator must record the sampling results, repair measures taken based on potential bad results (e.g., bolstering cleaning/improving instructions/changing the cleaning agent/replacing cleaning equipment), and the results of resampling.

The operator must review the trends (development trends) of the test results in the long run. Reviewing the development trends makes it possible to assess whether the preparation process and hygiene functions are in control. The review is made on an analysis-specific basis. If the trend is heading in an undesired direction, the operator must take immediate measures to prevent microbiological dangers. If the development trend of the results has remained on an acceptable level for three years, it is possible to diminish the sampling frequencies. Figures 1-3 show examples of trends. At its simplest, follow-up can take the form of entering the sample results into a squared notebook that shows the development trend of the results. You can also enter the results into a table in different colors, using the traffic-light model for visualizing the results, as shown in figure 4.

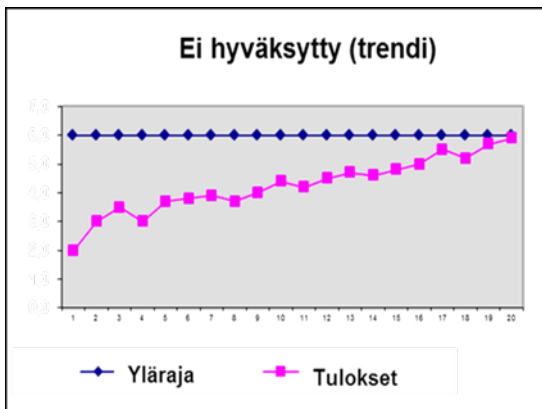
### Examples of following up trends:



**Figure 1.** The situation is acceptable in case of an indicator. Most often the situation requires measures to be taken, if a pathogen is at issue.



**Figure 2.** The situation is unacceptable. The food premises has a repeating problem, e.g., in the activities of one workshift.



**Figure 3.** The situation is unacceptable. In other words, the situation is unacceptable even though all the results fall below the limit. A rising trend requires measures to be taken.

Päiväys	Näytteenottopiste 1	Näytteenottopiste 2
	pmy/cm <sup>2</sup>	pmy/cm <sup>2</sup>
1.1.2023	1	2
16.2.2023	2	2
3.4.2023	1	10
15.5.2023	7	60
30.6.2023	8	2
18.8.2023	2	2
1.10.2023	1	1

**Figure 4.** The traffic-light model for visualizing results.

## Instructions

The instructions were made in cooperation with Uusimaa food control units on February 6, 2020 (updated on September 12, 2025).

## Links

[Laboratories designated based on the Food Act](#)

[Elintarvikkeiden mikrobiologiset vaatimukset - Ohje elintarvikealan toimijoille \(Ruokaviraston ohje 4095/04.02.00.01/2020/3\) \("Microbiological requirements for foodstuffs - Instructions for food-industry operators \(The Finnish Food Authority instructions 4095/04.02.00.01/2020/3\)"](#)

[Omavalvonnan suositellut näytteenottotiheydet vähittäismyynti- ja tarjoilupaikassa \("Recommended self-monitoring sampling frequencies in retail and serving places"\)](#)

[Medium-kypsennetyn jauhelihapihvin valmistus ja tarjoilu \("Preparing and serving medium-rare beef patties"\)](#)

[Veden ja jään valvonta elintarvikehuoneistoissa \("Supervising water and ice on food premises"\)](#)

## **Additional information is provided by your own district's food control:**

Vantaa Environment Centre / Environmental health, [ymparistoterveys@vantaa.fi](mailto:ymparistoterveys@vantaa.fi)