

Retailers and caterers must take further food safety precautions to avoid more E. coli outbreaks, says mpro5

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Businesses should digitise their food safety processes to protect customers from further infection, argues Sam Roberts, Food Retail lead at mpro5, the process management app

Harrowing reports of the recent UK E. coli outbreak have forced UK retailers and caterers to rethink their food safety processes, with the [UK Health Security Agency](#) reporting that a member of the public passed away from the outbreak in June. In 2024 there has been 288 [confirmed cases](#) of E. coli to date in the UK, with 49% being admitted to hospital.

It only takes one food safety incident to harm a retail or catering business's credibility. [Byron Burger's 2017 allergen incident](#) is a prime example of this. Without visibility over processes, food businesses have no way of knowing who or what was at fault, how to prevent it from happening again, and whether wider problems are at play.

Sam Roberts, Food Retail lead at mpro5, said: "Businesses across the food sector must learn from past mistakes and seek to protect their customers to avoid damaging their reputations. To start, they must prioritise digitising all safety logbooks, which are the bedrock of any food safety business. Most logs are still physical, paper booklets filled out by hand, creating unwanted extra admin for busy staff and making records easy to falsify. Many rely on paper logbooks to keep the EHO happy, with employees skipping paperwork in the moment, doing it retrospectively, merely as a box-ticking exercise. This means many never truly know how compliant their business is.

“Process management apps allow businesses to digitise their logbooks, allowing employees to log their food safety checks with entries timestamped and tied to a user, making them impossible to falsify. Data is collected continuously, allowing businesses to spot trends, identify and fix failures quickly, and know their compliance status at all times.”

The introduction of [Natasha's Law](#) in October 2021 means catering businesses now have an even greater responsibility to ensure their food labelling is clear, comprehensive and easy to understand. Failure to comply with the law is a criminal offence, damages businesses and has potentially tragic consequences for customers.

“Digital checklists for your staff and suppliers are one simple but effective method”, added Roberts.

“Checklists can include where employees have prepared medical diets properly, if they have evidence to prove it and if they have used the correct food labelling. Such lists can be managed in a single, central location in the cloud with staff working through them on a mobile app, instead of making unreliable paper records.

“If businesses rely on paper-based reporting, they cannot gain a clear view of their brand standards at any time. Cloud tools allow businesses to create digital checklists for all aspects of their brand standards, making it quicker and easier for your staff to follow and log their procedures. Brand standards data can be stored in a single, central location, pinpointing areas for improvement and tightening up processes, creating a clear, digital paper trail with photographic evidence. Subsequently, businesses can pinpoint incorrect labelling or inadequate food products to avoid food safety incidents.

“The recent E-coli outbreaks are worrying, and caterers and retailers must do more to safeguard their customers. Digitising key processes and compliance procedures may seem a daunting and expensive prospect, particularly for large businesses, but are a necessary investment for the future of food safety. Simple food safety process errors are easily avoided, and we must do more to protect customers from further allergen and bacterial outbreak risks”, concluded Roberts.