

Make hygiene-grading criteria public

I WONDER how many people pay attention to the **hygiene grading** of hawker stalls they patronise, let alone use it as a guide to make decisions on whether to patronise a particular stall or not.

The grading system should be retained but it could be modified to make it more effective, so that hawkers would have more reason to raise their standards of hygiene.

Unhygienic practices still abound among hawkers.

The following are the most common:

Handling cooked food with bare hands

This includes, for example, holding on to a piece of meat while cutting it.

Using the same piece of cloth for multiple purposes

I have witnessed a stallholder in a food court using one cloth to clean surfaces in the stall, wipe his hands and even dry wet crockery.

Not washing hands after visiting the toilet

My friends have seen cooks in uniform taking toilet breaks and walking straight out of the toilet without washing their hands.

Using gloved hands to handle other things besides cooked food

Using the same gloved hands to handle money and cooked food defeats the purpose of wearing gloves in the first place.

Improper cleaning of utensils

It is common to see **food debris**

such as rice stuck between the prongs of forks.

Forks and spoons are also cold and oily, which means that hot water was not used to wash them.

Moving forward, NEA should let the public know what its rating criteria are for food outlets.

Only then would the public be able to report cases of non-adherence to the **criteria**.

No list can be exhaustive but it would serve as a guide for members of the public.

It would also make it easier for them to alert the authorities in the event that hawkers or food outlets fall short of the criteria, as NEA officers cannot be **omnipresent**.

Hygiene standards also have to be looked at holistically.

Food preparation, the handling of leftovers, storage of food and waste-disposal systems, along with the standards of cleaning and maintenance, should be taken into consideration when rating a stall or food outlet.

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