Preventing slips during a busy café service

During service, a small spill can quickly become a shared-route hazard. Assign a response before the rush: who protects the affected space, who cleans it and who checks it is ready for normal use. Consider the route between the dishwasher, kitchen pass and customer area. Staff carrying hot dishes may have limited visibility of their feet. Store sharp tools safely and explain how breakages are isolated and reported.

UK practical awareness; equipment use follows local instruction and supervision.

The practical principles

Keep movement safe

Spills, grease, loose cables and damaged flooring make routine movement hazardous. Deal with contamination promptly using the local cleaning method, keep people away during cleaning and leave the area dry. A warning sign alerts people but leaves the underlying hazard to be addressed. Carry loads that let you see the route and use the designated routes between kitchen and service areas.

Control sharp and hot equipment

Use the knife and cutting surface intended for the job after instruction. Store knives safely and keep them visible during washing; concealed blades in sinks can injure another person. Use the correct protection and method for hot trays, steam and liquids. Warn colleagues about hot items during handovers. Follow the appliance-specific procedure for cleaning, shutdown and isolation before maintenance or reaching into equipment.

Make reporting useful

Tell the supervisor about loose pan handles, unreliable thermostats, damaged guards and repeated congestion. Stop using equipment that appears unsafe and follow the out-of-use procedure. Record near misses as well as injuries: a dropped hot tray can reveal a storage or route problem before somebody is burned. When someone is injured, summon the first aider and emergency help where needed, then preserve the facts for reporting.

Work through a shift scenario

Fictional exercise: ice spills beside the drinks station as a colleague approaches with hot coffee. The first action is to prevent someone entering the affected space while help is arranged. Use the approved clean-up method, including the equipment needed for the material involved. If glass is present, follow the breakage procedure and check whether exposed food or ice needs to be removed from use. Record the cause so the same situation is less likely next service.

Avoid the common failure

A warning sign alone does not remove a spill or protect every approach. Review both the immediate response and the source: leaking equipment, a difficult carrying route or inadequate storage. Give staff a clear way to request assistance when cleaning would otherwise leave the area unprotected.

A second situation to discuss

Fictional scenario: A tray nearly hits a colleague at the kitchen doorway. The doorway is cluttered, and another worker says it happens every weekend.

Make the route safe within your role and tell the supervisor about the repeated near misses. Record the time, location and obstruction. Ask for a revised movement or storage arrangement before the rush continues.

Use a working record

Record the specific arrangements below before the briefing. Keep the wording short enough for a colleague to use during the shift. Where a field does not apply, explain why; where information is missing, assign a person to resolve it. Store personal or sensitive details in the business's approved system.

- Exact location
- material or hazard
- temporary protection
- clean-up owner
- equipment defect
- reopening check

At the next handover, ask what changed, which action remains open and who now owns it. Close the record only when the agreed follow-up is complete. A recurring problem should inform the next briefing and the relevant operational procedure.

Check understanding

A wet-floor sign mainly:

Warns people while the hazard is controlled Cleaning and access control are still needed.

Where should knives be during washing?

Visible and handled under the safe procedure Hidden blades can injure colleagues.

A spill sits between the fryer and the pass: who controls the route?

Oil has reached the narrow path used to carry hot plates. A warning sign is available but queues form on either side of it. What should happen first?

Compare your decision

Stop people using the affected route and alert the shift lead. Arrange a safe alternative for hot dishes, then use the venue's spill procedure and suitable equipment. Reopen only after the floor and traffic route have been checked.

At handover, describe what caused the spill and who verified the route. A sign still standing after service tells the next team very little.

Sources and scope

- Source: https://www.hse.gov.uk/catering/
- Source: https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/cais6.pdf

Original workplace examples and suggested record. Prepared 19 October 2026. Use the current linked guidance and the venue's procedures for operational decisions.

Use this on shift

Resource page and fillable working record · Read the online guide · Course details