

# Avoiding cross-contamination in your food business

Guidance on how to prevent cross-contamination.

## What is cross-contamination

Cross-contamination is when bacteria is spread between food, surfaces or equipment.

### Raw food

It is most likely to happen when raw food touches or drips onto ready-to-eat food, equipment or surfaces. For example, if raw meat drips onto a cake in the fridge, bacteria will spread from the meat to the cake.

### Equipment

It can also happen when you use the same equipment for raw and ready-to-eat food. For example, if you cut raw chicken on a chopping board, bacteria will spread from the chicken to the board and knife. If you then use the same board and knife (without washing and disinfecting them thoroughly) to chop a cucumber, the bacteria will spread from the board and knife to the cucumber.

### Hands

Hands can also spread bacteria. If you do not wash your hands thoroughly after touching raw food, you can spread bacteria to the other things you touch.

Cross-contamination is one of the most common causes of food poisoning.

## Preventing cross-contamination

You must ensure that work areas, surfaces and equipment used for raw and ready-to-eat food are adequately separated.

To avoid cross-contamination you should also:

- [clean and disinfect work surfaces](#), chopping boards and equipment thoroughly before you start preparing food and after you have used them to prepare raw food
- use different equipment (including chopping boards and knives) for raw meat/poultry and ready-to-eat food unless they can be heat disinfected in, for example, a commercial dishwasher
- [wash your hands](#) thoroughly before preparing food and after touching raw food
- [always keep raw and ready-to-eat food separate](#), including packaging material for ready-to-eat food
- store raw food below ready-to-eat food in the fridge - use separate fridges for raw and ready-to-eat food if possible
- provide separate [food preparation areas](#), storage facilities, clothing and staff for the handling of ready-to-eat food

- if raw and ready-to-eat food need to be handled in the same preparation area, ensure the area is thoroughly disinfected between these uses.
- use separate machinery and equipment, such as [vacuum packing machines](#), slicers and mincers, for raw and ready-to-eat food or ensure they are thoroughly disinfected between uses
- use separate cleaning materials, including [cloths, sponges and mops](#) in areas where ready-to-eat foods are stored, handled and prepared
- make sure that your staff know how to avoid cross-contamination

## **Preventing E. coli cross-contamination**

We provide guidance on reducing the risk of [E.coli cross-contamination](#) which can also help to control other bacteria including salmonella and campylobacter.

## **Food safety coaching videos**

How to avoid cross-contamination in your food business

**Remember:** When you start a new food business or take over an existing business, [you must register with your local authority](#).