

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.

You can avoid food poisoning and keep yourself and others in your business safe by:

- preparing food hygienically
- not washing raw meat, fish and poultry
- washing fruit and vegetables
- storing food properly

Raw food

Harmful cross-contamination 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. Always ensure that raw food is covered and kept separate from ready to eat foods. Always wash hands adequately after handling raw meat, fish and poultry.

Equipment

Use different chopping boards and utensils for:

- raw meat, fish or poultry
- fruits and vegetables
- ready-to-eat foods like salads and cheese

Cross-contamination 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.

Remember to clean as you go - if you spill some food or juices from food, clear it up straight away and clean the surface thoroughly.

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. You should always wash your hands with soap and warm water before preparing and cooking food.

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

FSA Explains

Cross-contamination is what happens when bacteria or other microorganisms are unintentionally transferred from one object to another. The most common example is the transfer of bacteria between raw and cooked food.

This is thought to be the cause of most foodborne infections. For example, when you're preparing raw chicken, bacteria can spread to your chopping board, knife and hands and could cause food poisoning if you aren't careful.

Cross-contamination can also happen when bacteria is transferred in ways that are less obvious. For example, via touch areas such as door handles, bins, tills and touch screen electronics, or in the drips and splashes produced if meat is washed which can contaminate other surfaces.

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