

# Cross-Contamination

Good Hygiene Practice  
Guide No: 04

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## HACCP Chart Reference

Storage / Defrosting / Vac Packing / Preparation /  
Cooking / Cooling / Service / Bar / Hospitality

## Legal Requirements

UK and Ireland Food Hygiene Regulations require general consideration of the layout, design and construction of food premises in order to avoid potential sources of food contamination. This includes the ability for food production to ideally flow from one side (raw) through preparation and cooking to the service counter (ready-to-eat) in order to avoid the potential for cross-contamination.

## Definitions

Cross-contamination is the unintentional transfer of potentially harmful bacteria or other microorganisms, from raw or soiled foods to ready-to-eat foods. This can be direct, i.e. from one food directly to another, or indirect, where contamination happens via equipment, hands, surfaces, cloths etc.

Cross-contamination is thought to be the most common cause of foodborne illness and in the UK and Ireland it has been identified as the cause of significant E. coli O157 food poisoning outbreaks that had fatal consequences.



## Prevention of Cross-Contamination

The key control measures to prevent cross-contamination are:

- Separation between raw and ready-to-eat foods, contact surfaces, storage containers and equipment.
- Effective cleaning and sanitising food contact surfaces, equipment, containers etc.
- Good personal hygiene, particularly hand washing.
- Staff training and supervision, including refresher training.
- Management controls, which includes having detailed HACCP plans in place.

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### Stage

### Controls

#### Receipt

- Ensure raw foods are segregated from ready-to-eat foods in the delivery vehicle.
- Check the integrity of packaging and return any damaged or soiled ready-to-eat foods.
- Always wash your hands prior to and after receiving and handling deliveries.

#### Storage

- Raw foods must be stored separate from ready-to-eat foods at all times.
- Store raw foods at the bottom of refrigeration units to avoid direct contact with ready-to-eat foods.
- Keep ready-to-eat foods in appropriate covered containers or cover with food wrap.

#### Preparation

- Raw and ready-to-eat foods must be prepared separately:
  - Ideally separate by area, by designating a separate raw food preparation room or area in the kitchen where only raw food is to be handled and prepared.
  - If this is not possible, separate by time, by preparing ready-to-eat foods before raw foods. Ensure all work surfaces are thoroughly cleaned down and sanitised after the preparation of raw foods.
- Consider wearing a separate or disposable apron when handling raw foods.
- Use separate equipment and utensils for the preparation of raw and ready-to-eat foods, ensuring these are cleaned and sanitised between use.
- Adhere to colour coding for cutting boards and do not use worksurfaces as food contact surfaces.
- It is best practice to have separate, clearly labelled sanitiser spray bottles, knives, cling film, tin foil as well as disposable gloves and aprons in a designated raw box.
- Separate complex catering equipment such as mincers, slicers, blenders and vacuum pack machines must be provided and labelled for raw and ready-to-eat foods.
- Protect ready-to-eat food, equipment and service ware by storing them in separate areas of the kitchen, away from any raw food storage or preparation areas.
- Provide separate probe thermometers and label for use, such as for taking cooking and hot hold temperature checks and for other tasks such as delivery temperature checks, and ensure probe thermometers are sanitised before and after each use.
- Designate a raw food preparation sink where possible for washing raw vegetables and fruit, or thoroughly clean and sanitise sinks between use, following the 2-stage cleaning process.
- Maintain good standards of personal hygiene, by ensuring hands are washed between tasks and by avoiding touching other work surfaces, equipment or clothing.
- Do not wash raw meat or poultry to prevent splashing bacteria onto surrounding surfaces.
- Use tongs, other utensils or non-touch methods to avoid direct hand contact with food.

#### Cooking

- Ensure separate utensils are used for handling raw foods and for cooked foods.
- When cooking on an open griddle or BBQ create a raw and a cooked side and move meat and poultry from the raw side across to the cooked side as it cooks.
- Establish a flow to the cooking process, ensuring that raw foods are placed onto the cooking range away from cooked foods.
- Raw foods must be cooked to a core temperature of 75°C. Whole cuts of red meat required "rare", certain fish dishes and eggs may be cooked to a lower temperature (see GHP 9: Cooking for exceptions).

#### Cooling

- Only cool foods under supervised conditions ensuring they are kept away from any sources of potential contamination from raw food.

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### Cleaning

- Effective 2 stage cleaning is essential to prevent cross-contamination:
  - Stage 1: removal of loose debris, use cleaning chemical to wipe surface and remove loosed soils.
  - Stage 2: use of sanitiser for required contact time to ensure disinfection.
- Always use a sanitiser that is compliant to BS EN 1276 or BS EN 13697.
- Hand contact points, such as door handles, fridge handles and light switches must be regularly cleaned.
- Wherever possible equipment, utensils and food containers should be washed in dishwashers to ensure thermal disinfection.
- For units without a dishwasher, disinfection of equipment, containers and utensils that have been used for handling or storing raw foods may be achieved by using a chemical disinfectant and soaking items for the prescribed time. In ROI a designated separate double sink is required.

## Food preparation areas

Where a separate area for raw preparation is available, this must be clearly designated, and any equipment designated for raw use only should be stored in this area. Equipment used for read-to-eat food should not be stored in raw preparation areas.

Where space is limited and there is no facility for providing a separate raw prep area, separation must be based on time; work surfaces must be thoroughly cleaned and sanitised following the 2-stage cleaning process. Relevant signage should be displayed in these areas. When using time separation, work surfaces must not be used as food contact surfaces.

Raw food  
preparation area



Ready-to-eat  
food preparation  
area



This work bench can be  
used for both **RAW** and  
**READY-TO-EAT** Products

Raw products will be prepped first and then a complete  
clean and sanitise of the area will be conducted,  
before any Ready-to-Eat prep is carried out.

## Complex equipment

Equipment such as blenders, mincers and slicers cannot be cleaned adequately between uses and any contamination may not be adequately removed during routine cleaning and sanitising. To prevent potential cross-contamination, dual use is not permitted and complex equipment must be designated for raw or ready-to-eat use and be labelled accordingly.

Where the use of complex equipment is required to be changed from raw to ready-to-eat, a full dismantle is required and this cannot be carried out effectively during normal operations. Contact your HSE Lead or Regional H&S Manager for guidance. Vacuum packer use cannot be changed without the equipment being recommissioned (refer to GHP 15).

Raw food  
only

Ready-  
to-eat  
food only

## Utensils

Where utensils are used to handle or stir food during the cooking process, it is important that different, clean equipment is used when handling or stirring the cooked food. For example, when cooking minced meat products or searing whole cuts of meat, clean equipment is required to handle or stir the cooked minced meat or to handle the fully seared meat.

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## Colour Coding

Colour coded equipment helps to prevent cross-contamination and demonstrates good food safety and hygiene practice.

Any colour coding system used is as an aid to, rather than a replacement for, good hygiene practices. The following system follows industry best practice:

- **Red:** Raw meat and raw poultry
- **Blue:** Raw fish and fishery products
- **Yellow:** Cooked and ready-to-eat meats and fish, including smoked salmon or trout, gravadlax, raw fish for sushi, sushi, rare beef, etc
- **Brown:** Raw, uncooked vegetables that require further processing
- **Green:** Ready-to-eat salad and fruit
- **White:** Dairy and bakery



As a minimum, colour coded cutting boards must be provided. However, consideration should be given to other items such as knives, food equipment and utensils, cling film and foil dispensers, sanitiser spray bottles, cleaning cloths, cleaning equipment such as mops and buckets, and waste bins.

Cutting boards should be stored in racks, so that the cutting surfaces are not in contact with each other. This reduces the risk of cross-contamination and ensures effective drying.

It is best practice to store cutting boards used for raw food preparation in separate racks to those used for ready-to-eat foods.

Cutting boards should be cleaned in the dishwasher, after any debris has been washed off. Replace cutting boards that are scored, pitted or damaged as they cannot be properly cleaned and sanitised. As an alternative use a resurfacing service for worn cutting boards.



Ensure knives and knife storage racks are thoroughly cleaned and sanitised to remove the risk of potential cross-contamination between knives used to prepare raw products and those used to prepare ready-to-eat and cooked foods. Where possible use separate knife storage racks for raw and for ready-to-eat foods.

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## Checks

Unit Managers and Head Chefs are responsible for regularly observing the working practices of their colleagues to ensure the above Good Hygiene Practices are implemented to effectively manage the risks of cross-contamination.

The following checks should be undertaken daily:

- Colleagues are displaying good personal hygiene practices and in particular effective hand washing between the handling and preparation of raw and ready-to-eat foods.
- All colleagues are wearing suitable and clean uniform.
- Raw foods, including unwashed vegetables, are stored separately from ready-to-eat foods.
- All foods in fridges, other than unprepared vegetables, are covered.
- Separate equipment for the preparation of raw and of ready-to-eat foods is available and is being used.

## Corrective Action

If you believe controls are not being correctly implemented, the following actions must be taken as appropriate:

- Ensure controls are implemented, for example that hands are immediately washed and dried, replace any soiled or contaminated uniform / PPE, rearrange food being stored incorrectly etc.
- Discard any ready-to-eat or cooked food believed to have been contaminated.

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## Additional Guidance

1. Personal Hygiene
  - Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No: 2 - Personal Hygiene** for guidance on good personal hygiene practices, uniform and PPE, and food handlers return to work following illness
2. Pest Control
  - Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No: 3 - Pest Control** for guidance regarding the signs of pest infestation
3. Food Storage
  - Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No:5 - Food Deliveries & Storage** for guidance on food delivery checks and correct food storage arrangements to minimise cross-contamination
4. Food Preparation
  - Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No 7 - Food Preparation** for guidance on the safe preparation of food
5. Equipment Maintenance
  - Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No 14 - Food Premises** for guidance regarding catering equipment service and maintenance
6. Allergens
  - Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No 13 - Allergens** for guidance regarding allergen cross-contact
7. Vacuum Packing
  - Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No 15 - Vacuum Packing** for guidance regarding the use and cleaning of vacuum packing equipment

