

Guidance for food businesses: E. Coli O157 Control of Cross-contamination



Cross Contamination is one of the most common causes of food poisoning. It happens when harmful bacteria are spread onto food from either other food sources or from surfaces, hands or equipment that have been contaminated. This guidance outlines key steps to control cross contamination with E Coli O157.

During food hygiene inspections food officers will discuss how you control cross contamination and look at your procedures.

Cleaning Equipment

A heat disinfection method is the best way to effectively clean equipment and utensils. This means using a dishwasher or sterilising sink where very hot temperatures will kill bacteria.

If you do not have access to a dishwasher or sterilising sink then you **must** implement the following control measures:

Separate colour coded or distinguishable equipment for preparing raw and RTE foods including:

- Separate grill tongs for placing raw meat on the grill and for taking cooked meat off
- Separate chopping boards to prepare raw meat and RTE foods
- Separate knives to chop raw foods and RTE foods
- Separate storage equipment/areas for storing raw items and ready-to-eat foods.
- Separate cleaning equipment e.g. cloths should be used for raw and RTE utensils and equipment.

Equipment which is designated for RTE foods should always be washed before items used with raw foods.

Ready-to-eat (RTE) foods: Foods that can be eaten without any further processing such as salad/fruit/cooked products/chilled foods.

Raw foods: Foods that may be a source of harmful bacteria e.g. raw meat, unwashed fruit and vegetables, soiled foods.

Food Preparation Areas and Sinks

If possible separate food preparation areas should be used for raw and RTE food handling/preparation. If the kitchen is not big enough to allow this then the same work surface can be used however this **must** be carefully controlled:

- raw and RTE foods must be prepared at separate times
- food must not be prepared directly on the work surface, a suitable barrier method must be used e.g. a chopping board or container
- a 2 stage clean must be implemented before it can be used for RTE foods and after the area has been used to prepare raw foods

If possible, separate sinks should be used for raw and RTE foods and equipment. They can be shared provided that:

- the sink including any fittings, taps etc are cleaned and disinfected in between uses
- food does not come directly in contact with the sink and a barrier method is used e.g. a colander
- the sink undergoes a 2 stage clean in between uses

2 stage cleaning:

Stage 1: general cleaning using a detergent. This involves the physical removal of visible dirt and debris from surfaces and equipment, followed by a thorough rinse to ensure the removal of all residues from the surface before moving to stage 2.

Stage 2: disinfection. This involves the use of a disinfectant (approved to British Standards) following the manufacturer's instructions for its dilution rate and **contact time**. Disinfectants will not be effective if used on dirty surfaces, or if applied at the incorrect dilution or for the insufficient contact time

Disinfection and Cleaning Materials

The disinfectants used for cleaning food preparation areas, sinks and equipment **must** comply with the relevant British Standards; BS EN 1276 and/or BS EN 13697 and the correct dilution rate/contact time should be used.

British Standard EN 1276: For further information on chemicals that comply with this standard please see: www.disinfectant-info.co.uk

Contact time: This is how long a cleaning chemical needs to be left on the item/surface you are cleaning. It is important to follow the manufacturer's instructions on contact time for the chemical to work effectively. If no contact time is available on the bottle and the chemical complies with BS EN 1276 then you should follow a 5 minute contact time.

Display and Storage of Foods

If practical, use separate storage and display facilities e.g. fridges and freezers, for raw and RTE foods.

If the same facilities are used to store and display raw and RTE foods then you must ensure adequate separation. Often this will mean storing raw foods below RTE food.

Foods should be kept covered to prevent cross contamination.

If unpackaged raw and RTE foods are being displayed in the same fridge then a physical barrier of separation **must** be in place.

It is recommended that you store raw and RTE foods in separate designated areas even if the food is in sealed containers or packaged.

Remember to check the integrity and condition of packaging as this can also become a source of contamination if it is soiled or leaking.

Hand Washing

Regular effective hand washing is **essential** for personal hygiene and to control cross contamination risks in your food business.

Hand wash basins **must** be suitably located and have an adequate supply of hot and cold (or appropriately mixed) running water, soap and a hygienic form of drying hands.

If you have enough staff to designate them to separate tasks e.g. raw food preparation/service and RTE food preparation/service then it is always best practice to do this.

Complex Equipment

Complex pieces of equipment e.g. vacuum packers, mincers, slicers can be very difficult to clean especially internal parts. It is unlikely that these pieces of equipment can be stripped, cleaned and adequately disinfected in a normal working day.

Separate complex pieces of equipment **must** be used for raw and RTE foods.

Separate temperature probes, mixers and weighing scales are strongly recommended for use with raw and RTE foods.

Training and Supervision

Your staff **must** be instructed or trained in all safe methods that are relevant to the job they do **and** the competency of your staff must be supervised and reviewed regularly to establish the need of refreshing any training.

The FSA has produced some training videos for use by food businesses at www.youtube.com/user/FoodStandardsAgency

For further information including guidance about E. coli O157 and cross contamination follow the links at www.wigan.gov.uk/foodbusiness

If you want to register for individual regulatory advice and guidance follow the link at www.wigan.gov.uk/businessregulatoryadvice

Food Standards Agency (FSA) advice and guidance for food businesses www.food.gov.uk/business-industry