

# CROSS CONTAMINATION

Bacteria and viruses are hitchhikers and they need help to get from one place to another. Most of the time we provide help when we are careless and allow cross contamination to happen. The end result can be food poisoning.

## What is cross contamination?

Cross contamination occurs when bacteria and viruses are transferred from a contaminated surface to one which is not contaminated. The bacteria and viruses can come from people, work surfaces or equipment, other foods and pests. For example, it can happen when bacteria from the surface of raw meat, poultry and raw vegetables with visible dirt (such as unwashed potatoes), are transferred onto ready to eat food, such as green salads, rice or pasta salads, cooked meats or poultry and even fruit. The bacteria on the raw food are killed when the food is cooked, but the ready to eat food gets eaten without further cooking - bacteria and all.



## How are the bacteria transferred?

Hands are among the obvious culprits in transferring bacteria from raw to ready to eat food, but direct contact with raw foods, dirty chopping boards, knives and other cooking implements can also spread the contamination. Chopping boards, plates and knives that have been in contact with raw food need to be carefully washed with warm water and detergent, then rinsed, sanitised and thoroughly dried before being used for ready to eat foods.

Incorrectly storing raw food in the fridge by allowing it to come into direct contact with ready to eat foods, or allowing raw meat juices to drip onto cooked foods, fruit and other ready to eat food, can also cause cross contamination.

Raw foods should always be treated as though they are contaminated.

## How should raw and ready to eat food be stored?

Raw food, such as meat, poultry or seafood, should be stored in a rigid container or on the bottom shelf of the fridge to prevent it coming into contact with ready to eat food or allowing meat juices to drip onto other food. Ready to eat food should be stored covered in the fridge to further reduce the risks.

## What kind of chopping board is best to avoid cross contamination?

It really doesn't matter whether you have wooden, plastic or glass chopping boards so long as they are kept really clean and in good condition. The porous nature of wood makes it advisable to use plastic or glass chopping boards for raw meat, poultry and seafood. It may be easiest to have two boards - one for raw food and one for ready to eat food. All chopping boards should be scrubbed with hot water and detergent then sanitised after preparing raw foods. Plastic chopping boards are good as they can be washed at high temperatures in the dishwasher. However, any board should be replaced when its surface becomes scratched because bacteria can survive in the scratches.

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Council's Environmental Health Officers can be contacted between the hours of 8.30am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday.



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## How do I prevent cross contamination?

Cross contamination may occur in many ways, but just a few simple steps will help you prevent it from occurring in your business. These include:

- Using separate utensils or thoroughly washing and sanitising utensils between handling raw and ready to eat foods.
- Keep food covered and off the floor during storage.
- Avoid any unnecessary contact with food.
- Store raw foods, especially meat, fish and poultry, on the bottom shelf of the fridge or cool room to prevent blood dripping onto ready to eat foods.
- Keep cleaning chemicals and other non-food items stored away from food items.
- Regularly change, or wash and sanitise, cloths used for wiping benches, tables or other equipment. Never use cloths used for cleaning toilets or similar areas for cleaning anything that may come in contact with food.
- Let equipment and utensils air dry after washing and sanitizing.
- Have hands free or flip top spouts installed at hand wash basins.
- Provide liquid soap for washing hands.
- Dry hands with disposable paper towel after washing them and use the paper towel to turn off the tap.

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## When should I wash my hands?

Always wash and dry your hands:

- Upon entering the kitchen, before preparing food and after changing tasks.
- After touching raw meat, seafood, chicken or unwashed vegetables.
- After using the toilet.
- After blowing your nose.
- After touching a pet.
- After touching your hair or skin.

And for safety's sake remember the 6 key tips:

- Keep hot food above 60°C.
- Keep cold food refrigerated below 5°C.
- Cook food properly.
- Separate cooked, raw and ready to eat foods.
- Clean and sanitise all eating and drinking utensils, food processing equipment and surfaces and keep the kitchen clean.