

Food Safety Fact Sheet

Preventing Contamination During Food Preparation

INTRODUCTION

Cross contamination is the transfer of bacteria or viruses from hands to food, food to food, or equipment and food contact surfaces to food. Chemical contamination, or hazard, is when chemicals unintentionally come in contact with food. Cross contact occurs when an allergen is accidentally transferred from a food containing an allergen to a food or surface that does not contain the allergen. All three - cross contamination, chemical contamination/hazard, and cross contact - are types of contamination that can happen in a school. School nutrition employees can minimize or eliminate contamination by following the Standard Operating Procedures in their school food safety program.

HERE ARE THE FACTS

One of the most common causes of foodborne illness is cross contamination. Cross contamination may occur when 1) a sick employee handles food, 2) raw food contaminates a ready-to-eat food, 3) food contact surfaces are not cleaned and sanitized properly and come in contact with a ready-to-eat food, or 4) equipment is used for multiple foods without cleaning and sanitizing between preparing foods. Chemical contamination may occur if chemicals are improperly handled or if manufacturer instructions are not followed. Cross contact may occur if proper cleaning and food handling procedures are not followed while preparing allergen-free foods.

APPLICATION

There are many practices in the Standard Operating Procedures that school nutrition employees can follow to minimize or eliminate contamination.

Hand-to-Food Cross Contamination

- Wash hands properly, frequently, and at appropriate times.
- Wash hands before putting on single-use gloves and change gloves frequently.
- Wear gloves when handling ready-to-eat foods.
- Cover cuts, sores, and wounds with a clean bandage and a single-use glove.
- Keep fingernails short, unpolished, and clean.
- Do not wear jewelry, except for a plain band such as a wedding ring.
- Do not allow sick employees to work.

Food-to-Food Cross Contamination

- Separate raw animal foods from ready-to-eat foods during receiving, storage, and preparation.
- Separate different types of raw animal foods, such as eggs, fish, meat, and poultry, from each other except when combined in recipes.
- Separate unwashed fruits and vegetables from washed fruits and vegetables and other ready-to-eat foods.
- Place food in covered containers or packages, except during cooling. Store in the refrigerator or cooler.





Preventing Contamination During Food Preparation cont.

Equipment and Food Contact Surface-to-Food Cross Contamination

- Use only dry, cleaned, and sanitized equipment and utensils for food preparation.
- Clean and sanitize work tables, equipment, and cutting boards after each use and before beginning a new task. For example, after slicing ham, the slicer should be cleaned and sanitized before slicing turkey.
- Clean and sanitize surfaces that are handled often, such as refrigerator and freezer handles.
- Maintain a fresh bucket of cleaning solution and a fresh bucket of sanitizing solution in the work area so that cleaning and sanitizing can be done easily.

Chemical Contamination/Hazard

- Store chemicals away from food. Keep chemicals in a locked storage area with access only to authorized employees.
- Use Safety Data Sheets (SDS) provided by the manufacturer to ensure chemicals are stored and used properly.
- Check the concentration of the sanitizing solution with a sanitizing test kit to make sure it is at appropriate levels to sanitize.
- Store chemicals in original containers, never in containers that once stored food.
- Teach employees how to use chemicals.

Cross Contact

- Use color coded utensils, equipment, etc., or designate equipment and utensils for foods that are allergen-free.
- Isolate ingredients that are allergen-free in storage and preparation.
- Prepare allergen-free foods first, wrap and label them (with name, color code, or stickers), and place them on the top storage shelf until service.
- Follow proper handwashing procedures, and wash hands between handling allergen-free foods and foods which contain allergens.
- Properly clean and sanitize all utensils, equipment, and surfaces before preparing allergen-free foods.

Remember, follow state or local health department requirements.

References

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