



PREVENTING CROSS-CONTAMINATION IN BUTCHER SHOPS



Preventing cooked or ready-to-eat (RTE) foods from becoming contaminated by other activities in your shop is the most important of your food safety activities. Cross contamination can happen in a variety of ways, such as when there is direct contact between cooked and raw meat, when cooked food is placed on dirty surfaces, when someone touches cooked food after handling raw product. Any harmful bacteria, such as *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Campylobacter* and *E. coli* will be passed to the RTE food and on to your customers since food won't be processed further before it's eaten. *Listeria* is particularly dangerous and something you don't want on your hams, roast beef and salamis. Refrigerating foods usually slows bacterial growth, but *Listeria* grows under refrigeration, so it's vital you prevent it cross contaminating these foods.

You should also process different meat species separately. Chicken and beef, for example, can carry different types of harmful bacteria, so thoroughly clean and sanitise surfaces in between to prevent product from one species contaminating another.

HAND WASHING

You've heard it before but hand washing is really important to prevent cross contamination. Hands must be washed and dried thoroughly every time before handling RTE foods – which can be challenging when serving customers asking for both raw and cooked foods. Using gloves is no substitute for hand washing – they pass harmful bacteria to food, just like the hands they cover.

It's a good idea to have alcohol-based hand sanitisers around the butchery for staff to use after touching non-food surfaces – such as chiller door handles, cash registers, switches. Put a dispenser by the RTE meats processing area. Sanitisers need to be used in combination with hand washing, not as a substitute.

Tip

- Have a beer money jar and make staff put \$2 in it anytime they are spotted not washing their hands. Everyone will be washing their hands in no time!

Ideally you have separate chillers for raw and cooked products. If not, then keep raw and cooked products apart – either on opposite sides of the chiller, or store cooked above raw – to prevent raw juices dripping onto RTE food. Always wrap or cover stored products to prevent other things dropping into them as well. Use clean containers for RTE products that are colour coded or clearly marked so they won't be used for raw meat.

Tip

- The risk of cross contamination is highest when handling RTE product after it has been cooked

FURTHER PROCESSING EG SLICING, DICING, PACKING

Ideally you have a separate room for further processing RTE products, with equipment that is dedicated to this. If not, you'll need to have either:

- » an area or bench where only RTE meats are processed; or

- » carry out the further processing at a different time and before processing raw products – and only after thoroughly cleaning and sanitising the area and equipment.

Equipment should be clearly marked so it can't be used for raw meat. Slicers in particular are easy to contaminate with *Listeria* so it is important to use a dedicated slicer for RTE meats. Other dedicated

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equipment should include trays and containers, knives, tongs, chopping boards, scales, vacuum packers. Keep bags/package used for RTE foods separate from those used for raw meat.

Again ideally, you have separate display cabinets for unwrapped RTE meats and raw products; otherwise raw and RTE foods in the same display will need to be physically separated. Having a dedicated person processing, handling or serving unwrapped RTE foods reduces the chance that raw product will be touched at the same time. The fewer people involved in handling both raw meat and unwrapped cooked/RTE foods, the better.

Tip

- Remember that bacon is not RTE so keep this in the raw section and do not slice it on the RTE slicer

CLEANING AND SANITISING

Cleaning removes dirt and fat. Sanitising will kill harmful bacteria on clean surfaces. Clean food surfaces frequently, such as between batches of product, as well as at the end of the day. Don't forget places such as the underside of scale pans and handles on doors and equipment. Use single-use cloths wherever possible and throw them away after each task. Reusable cleaning cloths need to be thoroughly washed, sanitised and dried between use.

Tip

- Using isopropyl alcohol (not meths) in a spray bottle is a cheap and useful sanitiser, provided your surfaces are thoroughly clean. Spray on surfaces and let them dry before using them

Follow manufacturers instructions for using cleaning chemicals and sanitisers, otherwise you might be wasting your money! Check with your chemicals supplier for the best advice on minimising *Listeria* in your work place.

Take care if using high pressure hoses as they create aerosols that can easily spread bacteria from floors and walls onto your clean processing equipment and work surfaces.

USEFUL LINKS:

A really good butchery food safety video from the UK (but same principals apply) is at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMQoFpH5WiU>

Further guidance on *Listeria* can be found at <http://www.foodsafety.govt.nz/science-risk/programmes/hazard-risk-management/listeria.htm>

SHELF LIFE AND ADDITIVES

Accurately calculating the shelf life of RTE meats is very important. Some products are required to meet microbial limits set in the Australia and New Zealand Food Standards Code (the Code). You need to ensure that at the end of their shelf life products still meet these requirements. Further guidance is at:

http://www.foodsafety.govt.nz/elibrary/industry/Guide_Calculating-Contains_Background.pdf

Tip

- MPI recommends you test your product on a regular basis to ensure it meets the microbiological requirements of Standard 1.6.1 of the Food Standards Code

Standard 1.3.1 of the Code regulates the use of additives to food; for example the amount of sulphur dioxide that can be added to sausage meat. Other activities are prohibited, such as adding substances to raw meat to enhance its colour.

TRAINING

Make sure that your staff understand and follow the good hygienic practices needed to keep your food safe – your business reputation is on the line!

MONITORING AND KEEPING RECORDS

Making regular checks of the things that keep food safe is an important part of daily routine. It will help you identify an emerging problem and let you put things right before it becomes a major issue, saving you time and money. For example checking chiller food temperatures might identify an upward temperature trend indicating a problem with the equipment and allowing stock to be moved to another chiller while the matter is fixed. Keeping records of checks and of what you did to put things right provides evidence that you are diligent with your approach to food safety. If a food problem was linked to your butchery, any records made on the day are often the only way of showing that you were doing your job correctly. Customers who see that you care about food safety will have more confidence in your business.

Tip

- This MPI information is for guidance only. If you have any questions about food safety at your business, talk to either your auditor or your local council