SAFE FOOD HANDLING-Food Safety Fact Sheet #6
“Preventing Cross-Contamination”

Background Information

The literal definition of cross-contamination is the transfer of a contaminant from one source to another. Cross-contamination of food is a common cause of food borne illness. Foods can become contaminated by microorganisms from many different sources during the food preparation and storage procedures. Preventing cross-contamination is a major consideration to help prevent or eliminate food borne illness.

Key Concepts

There are three major ways that cross-contamination of food can occur: food to food, equipment to food, and people to food. Let’s look at each of these separately and see how they can occur and what we can do to prevent them from happening.

Food to Food

Food can become contaminated by bacteria from other foods. This type of cross-contamination is especially dangerous if raw foods come into contact with cooked foods. Some examples of this would be: in a refrigerator, meat drippings from raw meat stored on a top shelf may drip onto cooked vegetables placed on a lower shelf and raw chicken placed on a grill touching a steak that is being cooked on the same grill. In order to prevent food from becoming contaminated by microorganisms present in another food, practice the following:

- Store foods in designated storage areas. Keep food away from dishwashing areas, garbage rooms, restrooms, cleaning supplies and furnace rooms. Never store food near chemicals or cleaning supplies.
- Store food in proper containers. If food is removed from its original packaging, put it in a clean, sanitized container and cover it securely. The new container should be labeled with the name of the food and the expiration date.
- Wrap food properly before storing it. Leaving food uncovered can lead to cross-contamination. Cover food with tight-fitting plastic wrap or aluminum foil.
- Store raw meat, poultry, and fish separately from prepared and ready-to-eat food. Raw meat, poultry and fish should be stored in the following top-to-bottom order in the refrigerator: whole fish, whole cuts of beef and pork, ground meats and fish, and whole and ground poultry. Ready to eat food should always be stored on the top shelf in the refrigerator.
**Equipment to Food**

Cross-contamination can also occur from kitchen equipment and utensils to food. This type of contamination occurs because the equipment or utensils were not properly cleaned and sanitized between each use. Some examples are: using unclean slicers, can openers or knives to prepare food; using the same cutting board to cut raw poultry, then vegetables; storing a cooked product such as spaghetti sauce, in an unsanitized container that previously stored raw meat. In order to prevent food from becoming contaminated by microorganisms present on equipment, practice the following:

- Use separate equipment for each type of food. For example, use one set of cutting boards, utensils, and containers for raw poultry, another set for raw meat, and yet another for produce. Colored cutting boards and utensil handles can help keep equipment separate.
- Clean and sanitize all work surfaces, equipment, and utensils after each task. You cannot get by with just rinsing or even washing the equipment. To prevent microorganisms from contaminating food, you must wash, rinse, and sanitize the equipment. Proper sanitizing concentrations must be used (separate fact sheet on this topic.)
- Prep different types of food at different times. If you need to use the same table to prep different types of food, prep raw meat, fish, poultry, and ready-to-eat foods at different times. You still must wash, rinse, and sanitize work surfaces and utensils between each product. For example, by prepping ready-to-eat food before raw food, you can minimize the chance of cross-contamination.

**People to Food**

People can also be a source of cross-contamination to foods. Some examples are: handling foods after using the toilet without properly washing your hands; touching raw meats and then preparing vegetables without washing hands between tasks; using an apron to wipe your hands between handling different foods; and wiping a counter with a towel and then using it to dry your hands. In order to prevent food from becoming contaminated through people contact, practice the following:

- Wash your hands thoroughly between handling different foods and after any contamination.
- Avoid touching your face, skin and hair or wiping your hands on cleaning cloths or your apron.
- Don’t touch or prepare food if you have cuts or sores without using a double barrier, such as a bandage and a glove.
- Restrain hair using a hairnet or clean baseball cap.
- Use gloves, appropriate utensils, or deli tissues when handling ready-to-eat foods.
**Activity 1**

Place a check in front of each statement if it helps prevent cross-contamination.

1. ___ Use separate cutting boards for prepping raw meat and raw vegetables.
2. ___ Wash, then rinse a cutting board after prepping raw fish.
3. ___ Prep raw chicken and potato salad on the table at the same time.
4. ___ Wear a hairnet over your hair.
5. ___ Store raw chicken in the bottom of your refrigerator separate from all other foods.
6. ___ Wash, rinse, and sanitize utensils between each use.
7. ___ Use different colored cutting boards to prep different types of food.
8. ___ Wear a bandage and a glove over a minor cut on your hand.
9. ___ Store chemicals and cleaning supplies separately from any foods.
10. ___ Wipe your hands on your apron if they become soiled while preparing food.

**Activity 2**

What are the three different major ways that cross-contamination can occur:

1. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________
3. __________________________________________

**Activity 3**

Walk around the kitchen with your employees and show them where and how cross-contamination can occur. Have them respond with appropriate methods to prevent cross-contamination from happening at each spot. Stress the need for correct and frequent hand washing (fact sheet number 2) and point out that is the number one way that most foods become contaminated.

**Answer Key**

**Activity 1**

Numbers 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 should be checked.

**Activity 2**

Food to Food, Equipment to Food, and People to Food

**Activity 3**

As the activity states, walk your employees around the kitchen and point out equipment, storage areas, cutting boards, table surfaces, etc. where cross-contamination can occur. At each area, stop and ask them what measures could be used to prevent cross-contamination at this stop. Have them demonstrate cross-contamination prevention measures such as bandage and glove use, proper sanitizing after washing and rinsing, proper storage locations, etc.
REFERENCES


County of Sacramento, CA. www.SacCounty.net