

## Cross contamination

Cross contamination is one of the most common causes of food poisoning. Harmful bacteria may be associated with raw meats or unwashed vegetables and although they are destroyed by cooking, care must be taken to prevent their spread to ready to eat foods.

Simple ways to prevent cross contamination include:

- Keep raw or uncooked foods separate from ready to eat foods
- Store raw foods, e.g. raw meat and fish, in a separate fridge from ready to eat foods
- Keep foods covered to prevent both bacterial and foreign material contamination
- Prepare raw foods in a separate area from ready to eat foods
- Use different equipment for different types of food, e.g. colour coded chopping boards
- Use separate equipment for handling raw foods from that used for handling or serving cooked foods
- Wash and sanitise food preparation surfaces and equipment after use
- Ensure that your staff understand the principles of Assured Safe Catering / Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points

Perhaps, most importantly, maintain good personal hygiene standards and wash your hands regularly especially before preparing food, after visiting the toilet, or handling raw foods and rubbish.

### Contamination Risk from Raw Vegetables

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is reminding consumers to follow good hygiene practices when handling and preparing vegetables, including those grown in the ground. This follows their investigations into cases of E. coli earlier in the year in which they identified the handling of vegetables with soil on them as the probable source of the bacteria. These cases involved a different strain of E. coli to that involved in the outbreak in Germany linked to sprouted seeds widely reported in the summer.

Research by the FSA showed that food handlers

- Perceived that the risk of food poisoning associated with vegetables was low
- Were often unaware of the risk of cross-contamination from raw vegetables to other foods
- And are unaware of the risk of contamination from bacteria in the soil

Therefore it is important to

- Wash all vegetables to ensure that they are clean
- Wash all salad vegetables and fruit (unless peeled) with a salad sanitiser
- Pay particular attention to hand washing after handling raw vegetables
- Ensure equipment used to prepare vegetables, e.g. chopping boards, knives, etc. is washed and sanitised after use.

### Contamination from Sprouted Seeds

As mentioned above, there was a widely reported outbreak of E. coli O104 in Germany and France in the summer. The particular strain of E. coli involved caused severe symptoms of food poisoning that included bloody diarrhoea, kidney failure (Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome, HUS) and deaths in many cases. There were a total of 51 deaths linked to this outbreak with 860 cases of HUS and a further 3,029 cases of bloody diarrhoea reported in Germany.

Initially cucumbers, tomatoes and bean sprouts were suspected before the European Commission finally reported that the source of the outbreak was linked to a batch of fenugreek seeds originating in Egypt and exported to Germany. A UK company which was linked to the French E. coli outbreak had been supplied some of this batch of seeds from Germany.

The affected batches of fenugreek seeds were quickly withdrawn from sale and the EU implemented a temporary ban on the import of fenugreek and other seeds and beans from Egypt. This ban remained in force until 31 October. There was no evidence that any of the implicated seeds were on sale in the UK.

The FSA's advice to consumers is that sprouted seeds can now again be eaten raw if they were labelled 'ready to eat' but that all other sprouted seeds should still be cooked thoroughly until steaming hot. In addition, anyone who handles sprouted seeds and beans must pay particular attention to hand washing before handling other foods. All equipment used for raw sprouted seeds and beans must be thoroughly cleaned and sanitised before further use.

## Food hygiene ratings

In association with the Food Standards Agency (FSA), many local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are now operating the national Food Hygiene Ratings scheme, also known as Scores on the Doors. A separate scheme operates in Scotland, known as the Food Hygiene Information scheme.

The scheme is designed to allow members of the public to see how food businesses have been assessed by a local authority food safety officer in complying with food safety law. The business can display a certificate or sticker to show their score and the FSA also publishes the results on their website.

Around 160 local authorities run the national scheme and some others run slightly different schemes in their areas. The national scheme in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is a five-star scheme with the following ratings:

- Less than three stars – improvement is required
- Three stars – generally satisfactory
- More than three stars – good or very good

As the schemes are relatively new, many businesses still await their first assessment whilst others, such as sweetshops and newsagents which sell low-risk food items, may be exempt. You can find more information on the schemes and how food businesses have scored in your area on the FSA website at

<http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/webpage/moreabouten>.

## Risk assessments on under 18s

Employees under the age of 18 can sometimes be at greater risk in the workplace due to their inexperience of work and the hazards that come with it. It is therefore important that you look after your younger team members and encourage their enthusiasm and eagerness to learn new skills in a safe working environment.

**Wherever young people are employed or where work experience is being offered to students, special arrangements are legally required to ensure their health, safety and welfare.**

**If you employ anyone under 18, you must:**

- Carry out a risk assessment, or ensure that your current risk assessment covers any special needs of the young person
- Provide a suitable induction programme and additional training for them so that they understand the risks involved in the work and the procedures in place to minimise these risks



- Provide extra supervision, such as working alongside a more experienced member of the team
- Ensure that they do not work in certain operations or use particular items of equipment that they legally must not use
- For work experience students under 16 years of age, provide their parents or guardians with information on the hazards and risks in the workplace and the measures that are implemented to control them

## Safeguard-online system update

We are developing a new series of Guidance Notes on key health and safety subjects on safeguard-online that we will be publishing shortly. These Guidance Notes are designed to provide background information and additional guidance on each subject in a short factual document that can be either referred to online or be printed off for easy

reference. They are intended to present the key facts and to supplement information already contained within the main subject topics listed under 'Planning and Arrangements' or 'General Safety'.

We hope that you will find these Guidance Notes useful.



## Important gas safety information

**Statistics from the UK Health and Safety Executive identify around 200 incidents a year involving gas safety, including 15 to 20 fatalities, mainly from carbon monoxide poisoning.**

If your work involves the use of mains gas or liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) you must ensure that:

- All employees are aware of the procedure to follow in the event of a gas leak. That is:
  - » Turn off all gas equipment preferably at the mains gas supply
  - » Do not switch on any electrical equipment
  - » Do not light any naked flames
  - » Open doors and windows to increase ventilation
  - » Evacuate everyone from the area
  - » Do not return to the area until it is declared safe to do so by a Gas Safe registered engineer
- Gas equipment is installed, maintained and serviced annually by a registered Gas Safe engineer
- LPG equipment is located where it will not be a hazard or obstruction and LPG bottles are stored in a secure external, well-ventilated wire cage
- Suitable ventilation and ventilation equipment is provided and used
- Carbon monoxide detectors are provided and checked regularly. Carbon monoxide can be created by poorly maintained or poorly ventilated equipment. It can accumulate at floor level and cause drowsiness, headaches, unconsciousness and death
- All staff must be trained in the safe use of gas equipment and refresher training provided every 12 months. All training must be recorded

You can check whether an engineer or business is Gas Safe registered by checking on the Gas Safe Register website at [www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)

### Safeguard

You can contact Safeguard directly for more information about any of the articles appearing in this edition of our Newsletter or for any other health and safety or food safety information you may require. Contact Safeguard, Data Centre, 310 Broadway, Salford M50 2UE, Telephone: 0161 872 4781, [www.safeguard-online.co.uk](http://www.safeguard-online.co.uk)

## Recent prosecutions

### ESSEX SCHOOL FINED OVER INJURY TO CARETAKER

The caretaker at Shenfield High School was recladding the outside of the kitchen in July and was working with a colleague on an unguarded platform when he lost his footing and fell almost 2 metres to the ground. The 54 year old man suffered severe injuries; two broken ribs and a broken arm. He needed a three inch metal plate and several screws inserted into his arm to repair it. Falls from height often result in serious injury or death and therefore, the accident could have had more serious outcomes.

Chelmsford Magistrates Court heard that the school had failed to take suitable and sufficient measures to prevent an employee falling from height whilst carrying out the work. The school has a duty of care to protect its staff whilst at work and should have provided an appropriate work platform whilst the work was being carried out. The school was fined £6500 and ordered to pay £2243.85 in costs.

### M&S FINED £1 MILLION OVER BREACHES OF ASBESTOS REGULATIONS

Marks and Spencer plc were fined £1 million pounds with costs of £600,000 at Bournemouth Crown Court in September for putting members of the public, staff and construction workers at risk to asbestos containing materials during refurbishment of its stores in Reading and Bournemouth. Three of its contractors were also fined for the same incidents. M&S did not allocate sufficient time and space for the removal of asbestos containing ceiling tiles as they required their contractors to work overnight in small enclosures to remove the tiles and then be ready to reopen the store the following day. The void between the ceiling tiles and the floor above had not been sealed sufficiently to prevent the recontamination of the void by asbestos fibres whilst the work was being undertaken.

M&S had produced guidance for its contractors on the removal of the asbestos containing materials that did not comply with the minimum standards set out in the legislation and in approved codes of practice. Their contractors had followed the M&S guidance which resulted in poor standards of work and risks to their workers and members of the public.