

Understanding Cross-Contamination

Cross-contamination is the contamination of a food product from another source. There are three main ways cross-contamination can occur:

- Food to food
- People to food
- Equipment to food

Food to Food

Food can become contaminated by bacteria and/or viruses from other foods. This type of cross-contamination is especially dangerous when raw foods come into contact with cooked foods. Here are some examples of food to food cross-contamination:

- In a refrigerator, meat drippings from raw meat stored on a top shelf might drip onto ready-to-eat vegetables placed on lower shelf.
- Raw chicken placed on a grill touching a steak that is being cooked.

People to Food

People can also be a source of cross-contamination to foods. Some examples are:

- Handling foods after using the toilet without first properly washing hands.
- Bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods, such as drink garnishes.
- Touching raw meats and then preparing vegetables without washing hands between tasks.
- Using an apron to wipe hands between handling different foods, or wiping a counter with a towel and then using it to dry hands.

Equipment to Food

Contamination can also be passed 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 equipment, such as slicers, can openers, and utensils, to prepare food.

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- Using a cutting board and the same knife when cutting different types of foods, such as cutting raw chicken followed by salad preparation.
- Storing a cooked product, such as a sauce, in an unsanitized container that previously stored raw meat.

Preventing Cross-Contamination

Follow these steps to prevent cross-contamination and reduce hazards to food:

- Wash your hands thoroughly between handling different foods, changing tasks, and after using the toilet.
- Wash and sanitize all equipment and utensils that have come in contact with food.
- Avoid touching your face, skin, and hair or wiping your hands-on cleaning cloths or aprons.
- Store foods properly by separating washed or prepared foods from unwashed or raw foods.

Try preparing each type of food at different times, and then clean and sanitize food contact surfaces between each task.