

Cross Contact Risks in Food Service

Cross Contamination vs Cross Contact

Cross Contamination is often thought of as the common factor in the cause of foodborne illness. Micro-organisms such as bacteria and viruses from different sources can contaminate foods during preparation and storage. Proper cooking of the contaminated food will, in most cases, reduce or eliminate the chances of contracting a foodborne illness.

Cross Contamination or Cross Contact also occurs when an allergen (protein) is inadvertently transferred from a food containing an allergen to a food that does not contain it. Cooking does not reduce or eliminate the chances of a person with an allergy having a reaction to the food eaten. Cross Contact is a relatively new definition in Food Safety Terminology.

Examples of **Direct** Cross-Contact: (the allergen is added to the food and then removed)

- Taking the cheese slice off a cheeseburger to make it a hamburger
- Removing the croutons from a Caesar salad
- Removing whole prawns as a garnish from a salmon mousse

Examples of **Indirect** Cross-Contact: (the allergen was not added directly to the food)

- Preparing a normal sandwich before a GF sandwich using the same board
- Grating cheese then making a ham salad without washing hands
- Using the same knife to butter a toasted teacake, then using it to butter a GF scone

Essential Information

For some allergy sufferers all it takes is a tiny amount of the allergen to be present in the food that they eat to cause a severe and potentially life-threatening reaction.

Most allergic reactions happen when eating out so make sure that the restaurant is aware of your food allergy or dietary requirement. Two-way communication is critical.

Cross contact is a major risk factor for the Food Hypersensitive [FHS] customer to consider when eating out so it is essential to speak to a manager about the allergen control procedures which are in place to reduce the risk. Ask for specific details of cooking methods and food preparation procedures when the kitchen is producing a special meal.

It is a legal requirement for all food businesses to provide accurate and verifiable information on the allergens present in all the food that they prepare, cook and serve and they should also be able to demonstrate their awareness of the risks of cross contact and have controls in place to reduce that risk.

Menu items and dish descriptions should be clear and ideally state when a dish contains significant amounts of an allergen. FHS customers should also be made aware of "may contain".

Areas of concern

- Is there a separate fryer for Gluten Free items?
- What is the procedure for special meal preparation?
- Does the beefburger contain gluten?
- How is the griddle cleaned and how will they prepare your meal safely?
(A flat top grill or griddle may also be used for items such as eggs and burger buns so there may be traces of egg, milk or wheat protein present)
- What are the ingredients of the marinade/dressing?
- Does the mayonnaise contain milk?

Checks:

- Garnishes- check for allergens (butter glaze on vegetables, mustard & cress)
- Glazes on pastry/bread (egg or milk)
- Spice blends such as Curry Powder and Garam Masala (mustard, sesame)
- Cooking methods- griddle/frying/stir-frying/steaming/papillote (review the preparation methods used and ensure controls are in place)

The FHS customer should always communicate their allergens and businesses should ask at all stages of the customer journey if the customer has food sensitivities. The FHS customer needs to have confidence in the staff and their control measures. For further information please visit our website.

<https://foodallergyaware.co.uk/resources/factsheets/>