

Risks of allergen cross contamination in the kitchen

Keeping the Kitchen Safe

Back of House and Front of House requirements can be quite different when considering the needs of the Food Hypersensitive customer. There are times that those requirements will overlap. This factsheet is mainly focusing on the back of house situations and things to consider preventing cross-contamination risks. The principles applied from a Food Safety perspective can be easily and similarly adapted to those applied when considering allergen management within a kitchen. The care you would take to prevent cross contamination between raw and cooked meat is the same level of consideration that you should take to prevent cross contamination of gluten and non-gluten containing foods, for example.

Cross Contamination Hotspots

Consider where the hotspots might be in your working kitchen!

- **Workspace** – Do you have a separate area that food for the food hypersensitive (FHS) customer can be prepared? Do you have a process for cleaning down, protective clothing/gloves if prepared in a shared area?
- **What are the risks for stored foods containing allergens could be spilt in the designated FHS food prep area?**
- **Utensils** – Are there enough utensils in the kitchen to prevent the risk of cross contamination?
- **Cooking Areas** – Oven, grill, hob. Is there a risk that an incident of cross contamination could occur during the cooking process? A sauce accidentally dripping into a pan as it is spooned into another across the hob is a cross contamination hotspot.
- **Service** – Is there a separate process or area for how the FHS customer's food is served? Is it served under the supervision of the duty manager? Is it served before/after all other dishes for that table?
- **Cleaning** – How frequently are you cleaning down the workspaces? If wheat flour is used in the kitchen, that could travel in the air and settle on the counter that has been designated for the FHS customer food prep. Are there processes in place to prevent or minimise the risks that this situation presents?

Cooking Processes

- **Frying** – Does the kitchen have separate fryers for something like chips? If chips are cooked in the same oils as something like onion rings or battered fish, they can no longer be sold as gluten free, or fish free.
- **Boiling/steam** – vapour of certain foods e.g., shellfish can cause airborne allergen cross contamination.
- **Griddle** – Is the same griddle used to sear meats and toast bread? The risk and ability to clean everything thoroughly between dishes during a service will not be available.
- **Baking** – Are the cake tins that are used for baked products secure, and risk of batter leakage is minimal? Consider whether gluten free cakes can be cooked in a separate oven or at a separate time to gluten containing cakes to minimise cross contamination.

Utensils

Do you have a separate station where you prepare dishes for the food hypersensitive (FHS) customer?

- Separate utensils for the area of the kitchen preparing foods suitable for the FHS customer. E.g., the same tongs cannot be used for coated chicken breast and a plain chicken breast, when turning in the cooking process.
- Basic food safety teaches that you should have separate chopping boards for different food types e.g., raw and cooked meat. The same principle should be applied when preparing food for the FHS customer.
- Storage of foods for the FHS customer should also be considered. Clear labelling, and retaining source ingredient details is key, also how ingredients are stored, and decanted. Sealed containers and separate lower shelving are just a couple of suggestions.

Training is Vital!

All those working within the hospitality industry should be receiving up to date training, not only in Food Safety, but also in Allergen Management. Those that work back of house will have different considerations to think of than those that work front of house. However, both are important to ensure the safety of your FHS customers and the future business they can bring to your door if you get it right! Experience tells us that the FHS customer can be extremely loyal to those businesses that can adapt to their requirements and make their experience a positive one!

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