FACT SHEET 10

Cross- Contamination

What is Cross Contamination?

Cross contamination occurs when food becomes contaminated from another source. Bacteria tend to spread easily from one source to another. Cross contamination occurs when a ready-to-eat food comes into contact with another surface or product that causes it to become contaminated.

Cross contamination is a major problem with ready-to-eat foods (RTE) as no further processing occurs to the food before sale and consumption, meaning that if contamination occurs there is no way of minimizing or controlling the contamination ie: by applying heat. This means that if the food is not handled or stored correctly there is a high possibility of food poisoning occurring.

Causes

- Food stored inappropriately ie: not covered
- Benches and utensils not being cleaned and sanitized thoroughly between uses
- Failure to wash hands between change of tasks
- Carelessness

Prevention

- Make sure any raw meat products including fish are stored below and away from any foods which are cooked or ready-to-eat.
- Benches should always be thoroughly cleaned and sanitised before preparing ready-to-eat foods on them.
- All utensils e.g. knives and chopping boards that have been used to cut up raw meat should be cleaned and sanitised before being used for cooked and ready-to-eat foods.
- Ensure hands are always washed before touching ready-to-eat foods especially after handling raw meat or contaminated material such as rubbish.

A simple way to avoid cross contamination is to use separate colour coded utensils for raw and RTE products. For example all chopping boards, knife handles and containers used for raw meat may be **red**, cooked meats may be used on **brown** coded utensils, fruit and vegetable used on **green** coded utensils and all others white.

Cross Contamination Important Points

- Cross contamination occurs when bacteria are transferred from one food or food contact surface to another food.
- Ensure that all foods are stored covered and that raw foods are stored below and away from ready-to-eat foods.
- All food contact surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned and sanitised between uses.
- Ensure hands are always washed before touching ready-to-eat foods.
- The use of different colour coded utensils for raw and ready-to eat foods is a simple way to avoid cross contamination.

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