Slicing and packing

Goal

To ensure that slicing and packing of ready-to-eat (RTE) food is carried out hygienically.

Why?

- RTE food that is safe to eat without further processing.
- Dirty slicing equipment, hands, surfaces and packaging materials can contaminate RTE food with harmful microorganisms that can make people ill.

How this is done

> ! Control of *Listeria monocytogenes* is an important part of this process (see also *Listeria* in the management section).

RTE foods must be protected from coming into contact with potentially contaminated surfaces, such as equipment, raw foods, hands.

Surfaces and equipment must be in sound condition and clean before use. Surfaces in contact with RTE foods must be sanitised before use – see *Cleaning* and *Equipment, packaging and other items, Maintenance* and *Food allergens*.

Good hand hygiene and personal hygiene practices must be followed when handling food – see *Hand Hygiene* and *Personal hygiene*.

Containers, trays, pallets and boxes that have been used for raw materials must not be used for RTE food - See *Equipment, packaging and other items in contact with food*.

Staff must be able to handle RTE foods hygienically – see *Training, supervision and competence*.

Slicing and packing

RTE foods (e.g. smoked salmon, cooked meats) must be sliced and packed (identify which applies):

- in a separate room to raw foods; or

- in a defined area but separate from raw foods; or

- in the same place but at a different time to raw foods and with thorough cleaning and sanitising in between. (raw foods should be handled after RTE foods).

RTE foods are sliced and packaged (identify which applies) using:

- dedicated equipment (e.g. slicer, vacuum-packer, work surfaces, utensils);

- shared equipment that is thoroughly cleaned and sanitised (including, where necessary, taking it apart to clean hard-to-reach places) before use for RTE foods.

When slicing and packaging:
- Hands must be clean. A clean utensil, or a clean surface (such as wrapping film) must be used to minimise hand contact with RTE foods.
- Equipment and utensils used for raw foods must not be used for cooked or RTE foods unless they have been cleaned and sanitised before being used.
- Gloves, if used, must be changed before touching RTE food. Hands must be washed after taking off used gloves and before putting on clean gloves.

How this is done

- Gloves must be changed frequently.
- A ready supply of clean utensils, including display trays, tongs, must be provided for hygienic handling.
- Display signs and other items that may come into contact with unwrapped foods must be cleaned and sanitised at least daily.
- Food must be returned to chilled storage/display after slicing/packing;
- Food must be labelled appropriately according to how it is sold – see Food *Labelling, Establishing shelf life, Handling, displaying, serving RTE foods.*
- Where RTE foods might be handled at the same time as raw food (e.g. when attending to a customer order) whenever possible, RTE foods are handled before raw foods.
- New batches of sliced products must not be mixed with old batches.

What if there is a problem?

Product past its "Use-By" date must be thrown away.

Food that comes in contact with dirty surfaces (e.g. dropped on floor) must be thrown away.

Surfaces/equipment/utensils that have not been cleaned must be cleaned and sanitised before they are used for RTE foods.

Find out why this happened and take action to prevent it happening again. Review staff training.

Write it down

You must write down in the Cleaning schedule the surfaces cleaned and equipment used to clean them, when they need to be cleaned (and sanitised); how this is done, and by whom.

Write down (e.g. in the Diary):

- If something goes wrong with slicing and packaging and what you did to put things right

- what you did with food that was affected.

> ! Ideally RTE foods are handled in separate places to raw foods using equipment and utensils dedicated to RTE food to minimise the chance of cross-contamination with harmful organisms. See also *Managing Listeria*.