



Food safety advice

Cleaning Cloths

"Remember that a cleaning cloth is only as clean as the last item it was used on..."

Types

Many types of cloths are found in catering establishments. These range from re-useable ones such as fabric dishcloths, j-cloths and scourers to single-use ones such as disposable paper towels/blue roll. They are put to many different uses in the kitchen from sanitising work surfaces to deep cleaning tasks which when combined can lead to problems.

Problems

- Bacteria love warm, damp conditions to multiply so used cleaning cloths are ideal. Given time, bacteria will increase rapidly and could go on to cause problems if transferred onto surfaces/food.
- Employees hands can become contaminated from bacteria on cloths they use to clean with.
- Cloths used to clean surfaces used for raw food preparation and then surfaces used for food that is ready to eat can transfer bacteria from one area to another. This is known as cross contamination.
- Dirty cloths left overnight can be a breeding ground for bacteria – rinsing in hot water and detergent will not be enough to eliminate the germs.



Coventry Cleaning Cloth Sampling

Twenty businesses within Coventry were visited and a cleaning cloth sample was taken, as part of routine surveillance. The majority of the samples were found to have high levels of bacteria, some of which like E.coli could result in serious food poisoning illness.

When cleaning you should use a two staged approach. Firstly, the dirt/debris should be removed using a detergent (eg scourer and hot soapy water) and then the area/item should be sanitised with a food grade antibacterial spray (eg Dettol and a clean cloth).



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Safety Point	Why?
Use single-use cloths wherever possible and throw them away after each task.	This will make sure that any bacteria picked up by the cloth will not be spread around the kitchen.
Always use a new or freshly cleaned cloth to wipe work surfaces, equipment & utensils that will be used for ready-to-eat foods (such as cooked meats, salad etc.)	It is especially important to protect ready-to-eat foods from bacteria. This is because the food will not be cooked so any bacteria on the food will not be killed.
Remove reusable cloths for washing after cleaning dirty areas such as where raw meat/poultry, eggs or raw vegetables have been prepared.	Raw meat/poultry and eggs are more likely to contain harmful bacteria than other foods. The soil on vegetables can also contain harmful bacteria.
Where both raw and cooked foods are handled, separate cloths should be used. It is better for different coloured cloths to be used for different areas so they do not get mixed up.	This will avoid the possibility of cross-contamination.
Cloths used in the initial cleaning stages should not be used to apply disinfectant or sanitizer. Fresh cloths should be used.	If food or dirt is still on the cloth, this will prevent the disinfection process from being effective, so harmful bacteria might not be killed.
If using reusable cloths make sure they are thoroughly washed, disinfected and dried between tasks (not just when they look dirty).	Using dirty cloths can spread bacteria very easily.
Dirty cloths should be washed in a washing machine on a hot cycle or boiled to ensure they are clean.	A hot wash will clean cloths thoroughly and kill any bacteria present.
To avoid all of the above; use disposable cloths.	