

Review of the literature and guidance on food allergen cleaning: Lay summary

The aim of this work was to find information in research papers, book chapters, guidance documents and websites about cleaning to remove food allergens from surfaces in food factories (such as mixers, pipework and containers) and in catering businesses, such as restaurants and school canteens (including food preparation areas in kitchens, and equipment such as crockery (plates and dishes), cutlery and utensils (such as spoons and serving tongs), pots and pans).

People with food allergies must avoid eating the foods they are allergic to as they may react to very small amounts of such foods. Allergenic food left on surfaces or equipment could contaminate another food that is also prepared using the same surface or equipment or that may fall into the food from surfaces above in the same area. Cleaning of surfaces and equipment is therefore one way to prevent contamination with food allergens as well as ensure food is prepared hygienically. Food businesses let people know that food could be contaminated with allergens using Precautionary Allergen Labelling (PAL) such as 'may contain' statements. But unless businesses know how well cleaning is working and whether contamination may happen, they do not know whether to provide this information.

This study found that cleaning with water containing certain cleaning chemicals was generally better at removing food allergens than other types of cleaning, such as dry cleaning using brushes and vacuuming without water. However, how well particular ways of cleaning work depends on many things, such as the type of food to be removed, and what the surface is made from and its condition. Also, how well cleaning works can depend on the amount of time spent cleaning or whether items are left to soak rather than being washed quickly, the amount of effort or energy put into cleaning, the type and amount of cleaning products used and whether the water is hot or cold. There is therefore no single way of cleaning that will be effective at removing all types of foods from all surfaces.

It was found that more research is needed, for example, on how well dishwashers in catering kitchens can remove food allergens. The report provides an overview of the information found and recommendations for future work to help businesses provide safe food for consumers with food allergies.