

Cleaning

Effective cleaning removes bacteria on hands, equipment and surfaces, helping to stop harmful bacteria from spreading onto food.

Hands

Wash hands before you prepare, cook or eat food, where possible with warm soapy water. If it's not possible to wash your hands (for example at a picnic), use a wet wipe to clean your hands. Then use a sanitiser on top to sterilise them.

Dish cloths

Wash or change dish cloths, tea towels, sponges and oven gloves regularly and let them dry before you use them again. Dirty, damp cloths allow bacteria to breed.

Utensils and serving dishes

Take care to keep all utensils and dishes clean before preparing food to avoid cross-contamination. Use different utensils, plates and chopping boards for ready-to-eat foods and raw foods that require cooking, or wash them thoroughly between tasks.

Raw meat

Don't wash raw meat. Washing meat splashes bacteria onto your hands, clothes, utensils and worktops. Thorough cooking will kill any bacteria present.

How cleaning removes bacteria and viruses

You are removing bacteria from where they could cause a problem when you use warm, soapy water to wash your:

- hands
- work surfaces
- chopping boards
- knives

However, you are not actually killing the bacteria when you wash in this way. To kill the bacteria you need to wash the surfaces at temperatures above 70°C and maintain that temperature for some time. This temperature is too hot for your hands without the risk of serious scalding.

By washing with warm, soapy water, the lather and physical motion will detach the bacteria from the surface and they will be washed down the drain. The water treatment system will then remove the bacteria from waste water.

While it is possible to wash with cold water, warm water will ensure that the soap or detergent lathers up properly. It is important that the soap lathers so it can be more effective at removing the bacteria.

Detergents, disinfectants and sanitisers

There is a wide range of products available for cleaning and disinfection. Make sure you read the manufacturers' instructions carefully to ensure you are using the correct product for food surfaces.

To kill any harmful bacteria properly, make sure you:

- leave it on the surface for the time specified in the instructions
- read the manufacturers guidance to see if it needs to be diluted before use

Products will fall into three categories:

Detergents

Detergents clean the surface and remove grease, but they do not kill bacteria.

Disinfectants

Disinfectants kill bacteria and should be used on a visibly clean surface. They do not work effectively if the surface is covered in grease or visible dirt and it is important that you follow the specified contact times.

Sanitisers

Sanitisers can be used to both clean and disinfect as part of a two-stage approach. First use the sanitiser to clean the surface, removing any:

- dirt
- food
- grease

Re-apply to the visibly clean surface and leave for the required time to disinfect the surface.