

It is important to note that vacuum packing does not remove or prevent all bacterial growth. Clostridium Botulinum which causes Botulism a rare but potentially fatal infection. The toxins produced by it are the most powerful naturally occurring toxins known to science. They attack the nervous system (the nerves, brain and spinal cord) and cause paralysis. Left untreated, the paralysis will spread to the lungs, causing breathing failure followed by death. Clostridium Botulinum produces toxins in low oxygen environments such as vacuum packed foods and can survive after cooking. It should not cause problems with food stored below 30C.

**Think twice!**

Vacuum packing (VP) is a useful process which is used to extend the shelf-life or maintain the quality of packaged food. It is also becoming an increasingly popular practice in food preparation, through the 'Sous-vide' method. However if you are using this you will need additional documentation and should discuss this with environmental health. The correct maintenance of VP equipment - condition and cleanliness - is vital to ensure that it operates correctly.

**Personal hygiene**

- Foods being placed in VP can be contaminated if good personal hygiene is not maintained.
- Always thoroughly and hygienically wash and dry your hands before using VP equipment, particularly with ready-to-eat foods.
- Always ensure your protective over clothes and general personal hygiene is at a high standard.

**When things go wrong**

- If the pouches are pierced or lose vacuum they should be used as soon as possible - within three days of sealing - or before original product use by dates.
- If you think any food has been sealed in the VP machine when dirty, ensure it is disposed of immediately.

**How to stop it happening again**

- Ensure storage containers are suitable.
- Check on efficiency of VP machine.
- Improve staff supervision.
- Retrain staff on VP procedures.
- Write down what went wrong and what you did about it in your diary.



**Vacuum Packing**



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When using a Vacuum Packing machine it is very important that the process is carried out carefully to prevent cross contamination.

Safety point	Why?	How do you do this?
Raw and ready to eat (RTE) foods must be kept separate.	To prevent harmful bacteria from contaminating ready to eat foods. The E Coli 0157 control of cross contamination guidance states the dual use of complex equipment such as vacuum packing machines is NOT acceptable.	Do you use separate vacuum packing machines for raw and RTE foods? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If yes are they kept in separate designed areas to avoid cross contamination? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Vacuum packing pouches must be protected from contamination when stored.	To prevent cross contamination and loading of harmful bacteria.	Where do you store vacuum packing pouches? RTE foods _____ Raw foods _____
Sanitising of the vacuum packing machine must be done before and after every use.	The process of creating a vacuum draws bacteria into the pouch causing additional contamination to foods if it is not clean.  This can increase the bacterial loading on raw foods to such an extent that subsequent cooking may not kill bacteria to safe levels.  For RTE foods the loading of bacteria is an issue because they are not undergoing any further process to eliminate any harmful bacteria present.	Have you included this process in your cleaning schedule? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Efficient working of the vacuum packing machine is essential.	Failure to maintain the machine can result in ineffective sealing of the food under vacuum, leading to reduced durability of the product as well as the potential for contamination during and after the sealing process.	What checks do you carry out and how often? _____ _____  Who is the competent engineer used to service the machine? _____ _____
Vacuum packing can extend the shelf life of high risk foods, however these still need to be given a safe shelf life.	Removing air from food packaging can allow harmful spores to grow and produce toxins.	What shelf life do you give to vacuum packed foods? _____ _____

Safe method completed:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_