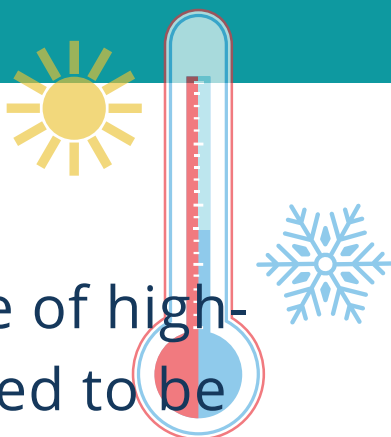




VACUUM PACKING FACTSHEET

VACUUM PACKING

Vacuum packing is a popular way of extending the shelf-life of food products. However, when using a vacuum packing machine it is important that the process is carried out carefully to prevent cross contamination.



SAFETY POINTS

Raw and ready to eat (RTE) foods must be kept separate.

Complex equipment such as vacuum packing machines must be completely dismantled to be effectively cleaned.

In practice this would require an engineer to dismantle the equipment. Therefore, the use of separate machines for raw and RTE food is required.

If a previously 'raw' vacuum packing machine is to be used for RTE foods.

The machine must be disinfected & sanitised before and after use.

You should service the vacuum packing machine regularly using a competent engineer and keep records to verify compliance.



Vacuum packing can extend the shelf life of high-risk chilled foods however these still need to be given a safe shelf life. Use by dates should be securely placed onto the vacuum-packed item. Current guidance [FSA Guidance](#) states 10 days maximum for foods stored between 3-8°C. The practice of giving a "rolling 10-day shelf-life" is of great concern. If a vacuum-packed product is unwrapped, e.g., for slicing or portioning, and then revacuumed, the shelf-life given to the re-wrapped product should mirror the original date. Consideration of the shelf life should be given once opened.

Food to be vacuum packed should be as fresh as possible.

Pouches must be stored separately in clean, dry conditions and not be exposed to contamination e.g. store raw and RTE food pouches separately.

Pouches should be protected from puncture by the item being vacuum packed e.g. protruding bones, and when being stored.

Train staff on vacuum packing procedures.



DANGERS/RISKS

The process of creating a vacuum can draw bacteria (E.coli 0157, Clostridium Botulinum and/or Listeria) 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.
The formation of toxins can lead to food poisoning which can be dangerous or life threatening.

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.

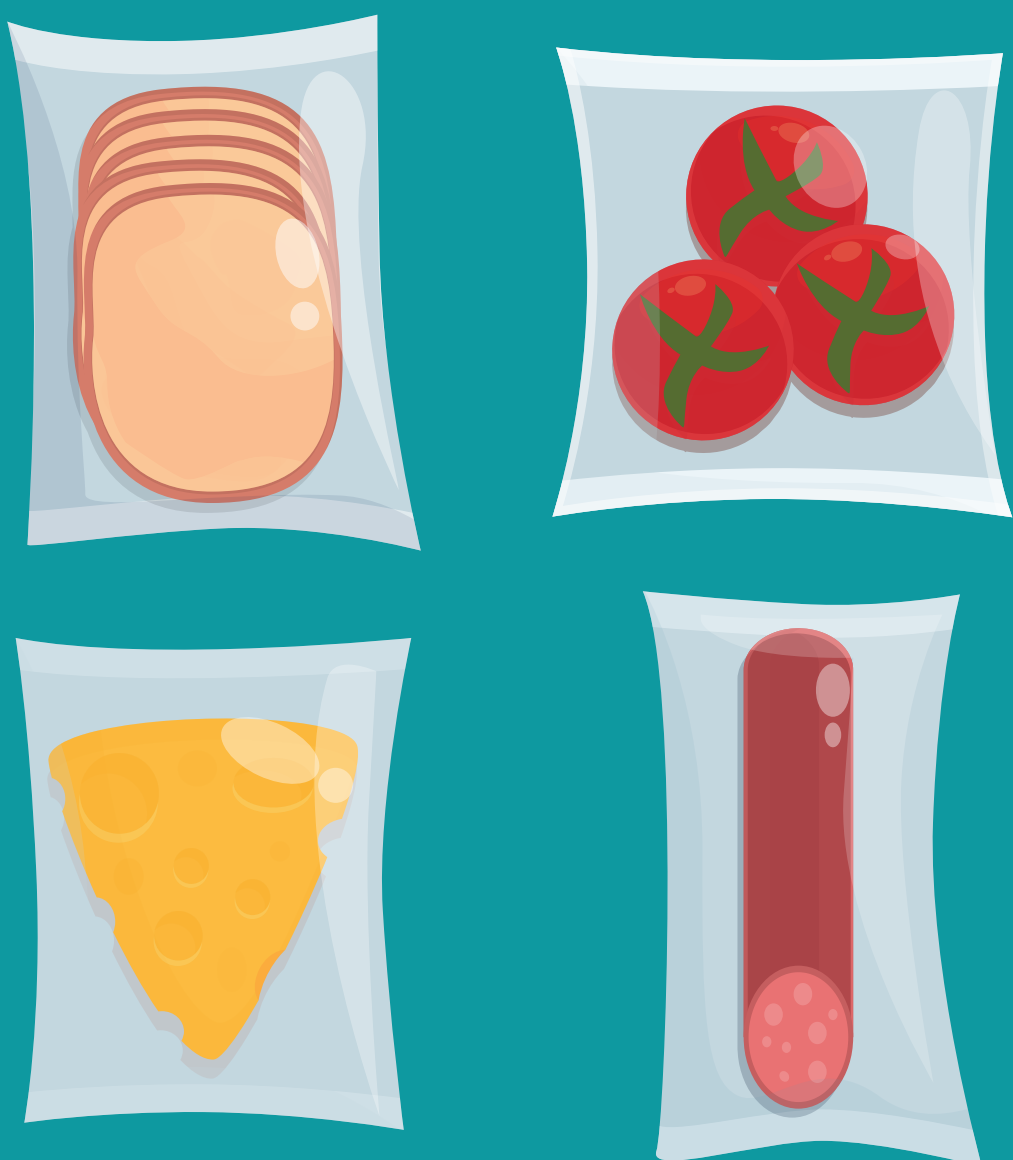
Removing air from food packaging can allow harmful spores to grow and produce toxins.

Botulism, produced by Clostridium botulinum bacteria, thrives in anaerobic, or oxygen-free, environments. Because vacuum sealing removes air, it sets up anaerobic conditions.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG

If the pouches are pierced or lose vacuum they should be used as soon as possible and within 3 days of sealing or before original product use by dates.

If you think any food has been sealed in the vacuum packing machine when dirty, ensure the food is disposed of immediately.



**READY
TO EAT**



RAW

HOW TO STOP THIS HAPPENING AGAIN

- Ensure vacuum packed pouches and storage containers are suitable.
- Check on efficiency of vacuum packing machine.
- Improve staff supervision.
- Retrain staff on vacuum packing procedures.
- Refer to manufacturers instructions