

Definitions

Aseptic means “free from pathogenic organisms.” An aseptic technique implies that you do not add any organisms (pathogenic or not) to the sample when it is collected. It does not imply that the sample is aseptic. The purpose of aseptically collecting a sample is to prevent contaminating the sample or the surrounding product/product contact area. That is why it is important to aseptically collect a sample even when the sample is intact. Wash and sanitize your hands before collecting an intact sample, but it is not necessary for you to sanitize the area and put on gloves. Good personal hygiene is essential anytime a sample is collected, whether it is intact or not.

Environmental samples are samples from surfaces that have

- indirect or potential contact with exposed RTE product in the RTE production area (mop handles, outer garments, etc., that may be handled by a person who may touch RTE product), or
- non-contact surfaces in a RTE production area (e.g., floors, drains, walls, overhead structures).

Food contact surface is specific to the RTE verification testing program. A food contact surface is the equipment or utensil surface with which exposed RTE product has direct contact (for example, conveyor belt, tabletop, knife blade). A food contact surface does not include items that may have indirect or potential contact with exposed RTE product.

Food contact surface samples are a collection of samples (e.g., swabs) from food contact surfaces that represent the conditions under which the sampled lot was processed. The samples are collected during the production shift, not pre-operational, but without disrupting production, such as during breaks and at the end of a shift.

Intact means product in the final packaged form (immediate container) in which it will be shipped. The lab receives the sample in the same immediate container that the consumer will, so whatever is in the product the lab gets is what is in the consumer’s product, too.

Recall is a plant’s voluntary removal of distributed meat or poultry products from commerce when there is reason to believe that such products are adulterated or misbranded under the provisions of the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA) or the Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA). Product that is adulterated and has left the establishment’s control may be subject to a recall. The recall would involve at least the sampled lot, but it could be expanded depending upon a review by the Recall Management Division (RMD) of all factors in the situation. FSIS Directive 8080.1 gives additional details on recalls.

RTE production area is one where exposed RTE products are stored, further processed, or packaged. This is the area from which food contact surface samples and environmental samples are taken and analyzed for *L. monocytogenes* or indicator organisms.

Sample is a collection of product that represents a larger group (the sampled lot) that has passed the plant's pre-shipment HACCP review.

Sampled lot is the amount of product represented by the sample. For microbial issues, the actual (affected) product represented by the sample is usually interpreted as the product produced from clean-up to clean-up. Often, factors like the plant's coding system, the pathogen of concern, the processing and packaging, the equipment, the plant's sampling programs, the HACCP plan monitoring and verification activities, the SSOP records, etc., are considered when determining how much product is actually represented by the sample.

Short-weight or slack-filled containers meet the definition of an intact sample, but with less product (e.g., a liner from a bulk package which contains approximately 2-lb of product, folded down and sealed in the same manner that the bulk product is normally packed to prevent product contamination). A short-weight or slack-filled sample is one that has progressed through all the production steps that the product normally goes through (not changed in any way that would affect the processing parameters). A short-weight or slack-filled sample may appear to the lab as a non-intact sample and may be discarded if you do not indicate that it is short-weight or slack-filled in block 28.

Subsequent production is all product produced after the sampled lot. It is not usually part of the sampled lot, but it may or may not be affected product.