

Potting mix storage and display

Potting mix may pose a health risk to customers. Retailers must store and display potting mix away from food to prevent contamination.

What is potting mix?

Potting mix is a blend of ingredients used to grow plants in containers. Typical potting mixes include a mix of materials to retain moisture, aid in aeration and drainage, and fertiliser. It is usually packaged in 25-litre bags and is commonly sold at supermarkets, convenience stores and service stations.

Why potting mix poses a risk

The ingredients and dampness in potting mix makes it an ideal breeding ground for bacteria. *Legionella longbeachae*, a bacteria commonly found in potting mix, can cause Legionnaires' disease, a form of pneumonia. This disease is often caused by inhaling or handling potting mix particles. Potting mix may also contain other biological, chemical, and physical contaminants that can pose a health risk to customers.

Food businesses have an obligation to protect food from contamination in accordance with 3.2.2 of the Food Standards Code, Food Safety Practices and General Requirements (clause 6 (1) (a)).

How to minimise the risk

Potting mix bags on display and in storage must be positioned away from foods to prevent contamination. Bags must also be handled carefully by employees and customers, especially when purchased with food items. To keep staff and customers safe:

- **Separate from food items** – keep potting mix away from all food items – especially unpackaged food such as fruit and vegetables – to prevent cross contamination.
- **Check for damage** – regularly inspect bags for any signs of damage, such as punctures and tears. Damaged bags should be removed from the display to prevent contamination.
- **Elevate display** – place potting mix bags on pallets or shelves. Keeping bags off the floor makes it easier to clean around them.
- **Cleanliness** – keep the display or storage area clean to prevent accumulation of dirt and dust from the potting mix.
- **Hygiene** – employees handling potting mix bags should wear a mask and gloves and wash their hands afterwards in accordance with [handwashing protocols \(PDF, 151 KB\)](#).
- **Follow** the manufacturer's safety instructions outlined on the packaging.

For more food safety information visit foodauthority.nsw.gov.au
