

The pick and mix hygiene debate

From the sweeties.net wiki

Pick and mix works because you can choose exactly what you want. The same openness is what worries people: many hands, many scoops and sweets sitting uncovered. The debate has run for years.

The scoop rule

Sweden, home of the Saturday sweets habit, set out a simple rule early. In 1984 the Swedish National Food Agency approved selling loose sweets in ordinary larger shops, on condition that each variety was kept in its own container and picked with a scoop or a small bucket: see [what is Swedish pick and mix?](#)

A school science project

In 2010, three transition year students from St Clare's Comprehensive School in Manorhamilton, County Leitrim, took pick and mix to the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition. They tested scoops, bins and sweets from pick and mix stands, and, as The Irish Times reported, found mainly staphylococcus and micrococcus bacteria, most of them on the scoops and the bins.

Some of their findings were striking:

- **Sugar coated sweets** with a granular coating stayed free of bacteria because, the report said, the organisms cannot tolerate the sugar.
- **Liquorice allsorts** were the most contaminated, which they linked to customers digging through the bin to pick out the pieces they wanted.
- **Their suggested fixes** were a robotic arm for picking out sweets, or a vertical dispenser.

It was a school project rather than a formal study.

Covid and the cinema counter

In 2020, the pandemic turned the debate into rules. Film Stories reported in November 2020 that guidance required cinemas to remove all unpackaged and open self service confectionery. Some cinemas took out their pick and mix displays altogether, and some chains were reported to be selling pick and mix ready packed instead, while the sweet supplier CandyKing offered bulk boxes for home delivery.

Allergies

Hygiene is not the only concern. Loose sweets sit side by side, and a scoop that moves from one container to another can carry traces of an allergen with it. Sellers of loose food must still give allergen information for every sweet that contains any of the 14 main allergens: see [pick and mix and allergies](#)

Keeping sweets fresh at home

Once your sweets are home, clean, dry, airtight storage keeps them at their best: see [how should you store pick and mix?](#)

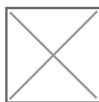
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