

Safe Food Donations



1-800-361-5653
TTY: **1-866-252-9933**



York Region Health Connection

Community and Health Services
Public Health

www.york.ca



Safe Food Donations

This guide has been developed to assist you in accepting food donations and handling food safely. This information has been developed by York Region in collaboration with many community partners.

Please review this guide with your staff. We encourage you to share it with your clients in order to help them make safe donations.

York Region Public Health is available to provide presentations on safe food donations to your staff upon request. For more information, or to request a presentation contact York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-252-9933.

Making sure food donations are safe

It's important to know that food donations are coming from an approved source. When food donations are received, examine them to ensure they are safe.

What to look for when receiving and examining food donations

Do not accept:

Home-made products
• Home preserves, e.g., jams, jellies • Home-made baked goods • Home-canned vegetables • Home-canned meat/fish products or combination products, e.g., antipasto
Eggs, Milk and Juice
• Unpasteurized juices • Ungraded eggs • Unpasteurized dairy products
Unlabeled products
• Food products that are not identifiable, e.g., unlabeled or not in their original container
Uninspected meat, poultry, fish and wild game
Surplus or Leftover Food
• Leftover food that has been served to customers or clients • Potentially hazardous foods that were not stored below 4°C (40°F) or above 60°C (140°F)
Damaged Goods
• Products in obviously damaged packages, including products with tears • Bottles with popped safety seals • Opened jars or leaking containers • Products with missing or open seals • Products in cardboard • Products in packages that have rodent holes or droppings • Swollen, dented, or leaking cans • Any products with unusual product separation, discoloration or foreign objects • Foods donated as a result of flood, fire, smoke, power interruption, etc.
Recalled products
• Check for updated information on recalled products at www.inspection.gc.ca

Do accept:

Eggs, Milk and Juice
• Pasteurized milk, juice, honey • Dairy products made from pasteurized milk • Graded eggs • Pasteurized liquid, frozen and dry eggs, and egg products
Meat, poultry and fish
• Inspected poultry, beef, pork, lamb, goat and internal organs • Commercially and legally caught or harvested fish that are approved for sale • Frozen fish from a supplier that freezes fish • Commercially and legally harvested, and properly labeled shellfish • Canned food products from a licensed food processor
Dry Goods
• Dry goods in unopened packages • Commercially baked products with no signs of spoilage
Canned Foods
• Slightly dented cans are acceptable (see Serious Can Defects, page 17)

Potentially hazardous foods

Potentially hazardous foods are those that support bacterial growth because they are rich in protein and have high moisture content. These foods are more likely to cause foodborne illness especially in older adults, young children and those with a compromised immune system. Potentially hazardous foods include dairy products, meat, fish, poultry, eggs, and some raw and cooked fruits and vegetables (e.g., bean sprouts, garlic in oil and sliced fruit).

Danger zone

The danger zone is the temperature zone where bacteria grow the fastest. The range is between 4°C (40°F) and 60°C (140°F). It is important to keep food out of this danger zone as much as possible. The longer food is left in this danger zone, the more bacteria can grow and the more dangerous the food can become. Heating food above 60°C (140°F) will kill live bacteria but it will not kill bacterial spores and may not get rid of toxins. Chilling food below 4°C (40°F) does not kill bacteria or eliminate spores or toxins; it only stops bacteria from growing.

Date labeling on pre-packaged foods

The best before date is the durable life period, starting the day a food is packaged for retail sale. It is the period of time that the food will retain its taste and nutritional value, when stored properly. Best before dates must appear on pre-packaged foods that will keep fresh for 90 days or less. The best before date is a quality based date label and is not a relevant food safety indicator as food will generally decline in quality before there is an increase in the level of food safety risk.

Best before dates only apply to unopened foods and once opened should be consumed rapidly. Foods susceptible to spoilage, such as milk, cheese, etc., should not be consumed if the best before date has passed. Questions regarding the safety of a product that has passed its best before date should be directed to the manufacturer of the product. In general, non-perishable foods such as crackers, canned foods, and cereal may be consumed up to one year after the best before date if packaging is not open or damaged.

When accepting donations, it is important to consider the storage and handling of potentially hazardous foods. Controlling the temperatures at which potentially hazardous food is kept and the length of time food is kept at those temperatures is vital to minimizing bacterial growth. By taking steps to minimize bacterial growth, many foods will be safe past the best before date.

If the product is not maintained at the proper temperature, the best before date will not be accurate. In some cases, a food product may not be safe within the prescribed best before date. For example, *Listeria* can survive and sometimes grow on food stored in the refrigerator. Higher risk foods include raw or contaminated milk, soft cheeses, and ready to eat meat such as hot dogs, pâté and non-dry deli meats such as chicken breast, bologna and ham.

Packaged on date

Products packaged at the retail store have packaged dates which must be accompanied by the durable life of the food, except where it appears on a poster next to the food. Fresh fruits and vegetables are exempt from this labeling.

Expiry Date

Expiry dates are required by law on infant formula, formulated liquid diets, meal replacements, pharmaceutical drugs and natural health products. After the expiry date, these products may not have the same nutrient content declared on the label.

Fresh Produce

Check fresh fruits and vegetables for wilting, mould or any signs of infestation by bugs or other pests. Reject any products that are not in good condition. Make sure sliced fruits and vegetables are refrigerated and are stored above any raw meats, poultry or seafood.

Dry Goods

Dry goods are foods like cereal, crackers, pretzels, sugar, flour, grains, nuts and rice. These products must be received in dry, unbroken packages. If protected from moisture, dry goods will keep for a long period. Moisture indicates exposure to contamination. Check packages for holes or tears which could be evidence of infestation. A good indication that the product is infested is by observing burrow holes, larva, webbing or actual insects inside the packaging. Grain products are highly susceptible to insect infestation (see Guidelines for Evaluating Boxed and Packaged Containers, page 15).

Dry goods are usually acceptable up to one year past the best before date if the packaging is in good condition. Store all grain and bulk foods in closed metal or plastic containers to prevent contamination and to keep pests out.

Canned Foods

Canned foods are usually acceptable up to one year past the best before date if the can has no serious defects. Products in cans that are only slightly dented may be safe for consumption. Canned food with severe defects may not be safe for consumption. Severe denting or denting at the seam or rim may allow air into the can, potentially exposing contents to bacteria and other germs that cause illness, thus posing a food safety hazard. Avoid canned foods that are swollen or bulging, leaking, rusted or dented at the seam or rim. Cans that are heavily corroded have likely been exposed to significant water damage.

Jarred Food

Containers with screw caps or lids, press caps or pull rings should be examined for serious jar defects. Jars with broken seals or popped tops should be discarded (see Serious Jar Defects, page 18).

Meat and Poultry

Meat and meat products should be held at less than 4°C (40°F) or frozen -18°C (0°F) and distributed in their original unopened packages. However, if large pieces of meat have been donated and further packaging such as cutting into smaller portions takes place, then proper food handling must be followed. Meat and poultry may only be donated from an approved source, if it is properly packaged and if it has been kept at the appropriate temperature during storage or transportation.

Eggs

Graded eggs and egg products should be refrigerated. Visibly cracked eggs should be discarded.

Dairy Products

Milk and milk products (including cream and cream products, ice cream, frozen desserts, yogurt and similar foods) must be pasteurized, held at 4°C (40°F) or lower or frozen at -18°C (0°F) or lower and distributed in their original, unopened containers.

Transportation

It is important that foods be transported at a safe temperature. Refrigerated foods should be transported at 4°C (40°F) or lower and frozen foods at -18°C (0°F) or lower.

Receiving

When receiving food products, probe food to check the internal temperature. If you cannot insert the thermometer directly into the product, open a case and insert the entire sensing area of the thermometer between two packages, being careful not to poke a hole in them. Reject any products that are too warm.

Frozen products should be checked carefully to make sure they have not thawed or been refrozen. Look for large ice crystals, solid areas of ice and discoloured or dried-out food. Reject any food product that may have been thawed and refrozen. Put accepted food in the refrigerator, date it and continue the thawing process. (see graphics and Perishable Food Decision Table for Frozen Food, page 12).

On occasion you may need to transport food to other locations. In addition to ensuring that appropriate temperatures are maintained, vehicles used to transport food should be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition. Food should be covered and protected during transport using food grade, clean containers or packaging. Food grade containers are made of corrosion-resistant, non-toxic materials that are easy to clean and sanitize. Non-food grade materials include plastic garbage bags and plastic storage bins; read the label to ensure the material is safe for food storage. Transporting food in coolers with ice or ice packs is acceptable. Keep a fridge thermometer in your coolers.

Donations of surplus or leftover food

Businesses may request to donate surplus or leftover food to your organization. It is important to use precaution when determining if the food can be accepted.

- Leftover food that has been served to customers or clients such as sandwiches or salads, buffet items or banquet leftovers should not be accepted.
- Food left out at room temperature for more than two hours; including transportation time should not be accepted.
- The business donating food must be able to confirm that high risk foods such as meat, seafood, poultry, eggs, dairy products or foods which contain these ingredients were stored below 4°C or above 60°C at their location.
- The temperature of the donated food should be taken and recorded at point of transfer. Food items not within the acceptable temperatures should not be accepted.
- Food should be transported in clean, covered food-grade containers.
- Food should be collected or delivered to your organization in the shortest period of time possible and consumed the same day.

If the safety of the food is in doubt, do not accept it.

Storage

All foods should be moved to their storage areas as soon possible to prevent contamination. Do not stack containers or cartons filled with raw foods such as meat, poultry or fresh produce on top of each other or above other foods; where they could leak onto and contaminate food in another container.

There are some general rules that apply to all types of food storage.

- Remove staples, nails or other fasteners from packages so they do not end up in the food. All food products should be kept at least 15 cm (six inches) off the floor. This makes cleaning and pest control easier.
- Chemicals and food must never be stored together. Keep chemicals in the original containers labeled with the proper mixing instructions, warnings and first-aid information.
- All foods should be stored in containers that are food grade and easy to clean. The original cardboard container for certain foods (e.g., mushrooms) is allowed, but it cannot be reused to store any other foods because it cannot be cleaned and sanitized properly.
- Adequate space for air flow and circulation both in cold storage (refrigerators and freezers) and room temperature storage areas is recommended.
- Keeping moisture low by storing in a dry area. This will help food last longer and prevent mould.

Managing inventory

An accurate inventory can help identify items in storage that have been recalled. A recall list can be used to check donated items before they are even stored or redistributed. Updated information on recalled products can be found at www.inspection.gc.ca.

Log information on all accepted products and where possible, record the following:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| • Date of donation | • Quantity received | • Temperature for potentially hazardous foods |
| • Name of a product | • Manufacture date | • Storage requirement and place for storage |
| • Name of person, organization or facility donating the product | • Manufacturer name | • Name of accepting person/ signature |
| | • Expiry, best before, or sell by date | |

Stock rotation – *first in, first out*

It is important to store food properly to keep food safe and fresh.

All foods stored in the freezer, refrigeration unit or dry storage should be rotated using the *first in, first out* (FIFO) rule and sorted by their expiration or best before dates. Products without expiration or best before dates should be dated when they are received. New products should be placed behind older products to make sure that older products are used first.

Follow the recommended storage times for refrigerated and frozen foods. Use the Cold Storage Guidelines to help you, page 14.

Repackaging

Where processing, cutting, and/or repackaging takes place, ensure that the layout, equipment, and cleaning and sanitizing of your facility complies with the Food Premises Regulation (hand sink, two-compartment sink, smooth countertops, etc.)

Repackaging should take place in a separate area away from receiving and storage. Food grade materials should be used for packaging any food product.

When repackaging, food must be properly labeled. Information on the label must include: the type of food, production date, or best before/expiry date and details of where the food was produced.

For raw meat, poultry and poultry products, use separate cutting boards and clean and sanitize as often as necessary according to the *Food Premises Regulation* at www.e-laws.gov.on.ca

If vacuum packaging equipment is used for repackaging, special precautions must be taken. If the item being packaged is a potentially hazardous food item, it still must be kept refrigerated or frozen after repackaging. Smoked fish in packages that are vacuum sealed to exclude air and without any other means of preservation must be kept frozen.

Public health inspectors can provide advice on storage practices. Training for the personnel responsible for further processing (e.g., cutting of meat and poultry) is very important. Arrangements for Food Handler Certification or consultation regarding equipment and layout can be made by contacting York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-252-9933.

Allergens

Food allergies or sensitivities to certain foods are a problem for many people. It is critical that ingredient lists are on all products. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has identified the following foods and additives as causing the most common and severe allergic reactions:

- Eggs
- Peanuts
- Sesame seeds
- Sulphites
- Wheat
- Milk
- Seafood (fish, crustaceans, shellfish)
- Soy
- Tree nuts (almonds, brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts or filberts, macadamia nuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios, walnuts)

For more information on each of these allergens, please visit www.inspection.gc.ca

Mould

Some moulds make toxins that can cause serious illness or infections. You cannot tell by looking whether the mould you see is toxic. Mould can grow on almost any food at any storage temperature and under any conditions. Freezing prevents the growth of mould but will not kill any mould cells already in the food. The mould that you see on food is not the only mould that is there. If it creates poisons, they are generally under the surface of the food. The softer the food, the further into the food the mould is likely to spread.

Food Handling and Donations

Hand washing, when done correctly, is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of food-borne illnesses. All employees or volunteers that work in direct contact with food must wash hands:

- Before starting work and as often as necessary
- After smoking, eating, or using the washroom
- After handling raw meat or poultry
- Before handling any food (e.g., repackaging) or cleaning dishes and utensils

Employees and volunteers should wear clean outer garments and have their hair confined.

No person should handle food while ill with a disease that may be spread through food (e.g., Hepatitis A, Salmonella, Shigella, E. coli). Employees and volunteers experiencing diarrhea, vomiting, fever, sore throat, persistent cough or sneezing must not handle food. Volunteers experiencing these symptoms must remain off work until symptom free for a minimum of 24 hours. The employees must also report (to management) any open or infected wounds so precautions can be taken to prevent food contamination.

Glove use

The use of disposable gloves is not to be considered a substitute for thorough hand washing. Gloves are an additional barrier and are intended to prevent cross-contamination during food handling.

Guidelines for glove use:

- Wash hands thoroughly before and after wearing gloves
- Change gloves as soon as they become soiled or torn and before beginning a new task
- All single-use gloves are to be discarded once task is completed - do not wash or reuse gloves
- Store gloves in a manner that protects them from contamination
- Always remove gloves in a manner that prevents the outside of the glove from touching your hand
- Heavy, reusable, rubber gloves must be cleaned and sanitized after use and must be thoroughly dried before reuse
- Gloves must be worn if the food handler has a cut or infection

Latex gloves are not recommended for use in food premises. People with extreme latex sensitivities can react to food or utensils that have been handled by workers wearing latex gloves. Allergic reactions range from immediate swelling of the lips, eyes and mouth, to wheezing, asthmatic attacks, severe cramps, vomiting and diarrhea or, in extreme cases, anaphylactic shock. Alternatives to latex gloves are vinyl, nitrile, neoprene or polyethylene gloves.

Equipment and Utensils

Equipment, utensils and surfaces that come into contact with food should be made of non-toxic, non-corrosive materials and be easily cleanable. Equipment should be maintained to facilitate cleaning and be kept in good repair.

Cleaning and sanitizing

Utensils and food contact surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized before use.

Cleaning involves the use of soap, warm water and friction to remove oil, grease, dirt and debris from utensils and food contact surfaces. It is important to clean before sanitizing. Cleaning will allow a sanitizer to work properly. When it comes to food contact surfaces like counters, dishes, cutting boards or utensils, cleaning alone is not enough. A surface can look clean but still have unsafe levels of microorganisms. Once a food contact surface item is clean, the next step is to sanitize it.

When you sanitize, you reduce the number of microorganisms to safe levels. Examples of this could be soaking cleaned utensils in diluted bleach or using the very high water temperatures in the sanitizing cycle on a mechanical dishwasher.

Maintenance

How a premise is organized and maintained impacts food safety. The building should:

- Be equipped with safe, hot and cold running water for cleaning and hand washing
- Be kept clean, in good repair and pest free
- Have good lighting and ventilation

For new operations, the physical facility should be reviewed with York Region Public Health. Contact York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-252-9933 to speak with a public health inspector.

Sanitary facilities

Washrooms must be kept clean and in good repair at all times. They should not open directly into an area where unpackaged food is handled or stored. Hand wash basins must be equipped with liquid soap in a dispenser as well as a supply of single-service paper towel, a continuous cloth roller towel in a mechanical devise or a hot air dryer.

Garbage

Garbage containers inside your facility should be easy to access. Make sure there are enough available to avoid overflow and they are emptied regularly. Any time garbage containers are full, they need to be emptied.

Lids or other kinds of covering, like a garbage container inside a compartment with a swinging door, will help to prevent odours, pests and airborne contamination. Garbage containers need to be made of durable materials, and cleaned and sanitized each time they are emptied.

Outdoor garbage containers must be able to keep pests out and odours or health hazards, like contaminated food, in. Any spills or leaks should be cleaned up right away.

Insects, rodent and animal control

Insects and rodents are more than just a nuisance in a food premises. Pests can contaminate your food supplies. They can damage your building by causing electrical or fire hazards and creating holes in the building structure. Effective measures should be taken to prevent rodents, insects, pets and other animals from entering the location. A licensed pest control operator should be contacted for assistance as needed.

Perishable Food Decision Table for Frozen Food

Type of Food	Partially Frozen (some ice crystals)	Completely Thawed and below 4°C (40°F)	Completely Thawed and above 4°C (40°F)
Meat (beef, veal, lamb, pork)	Refreeze	Cook and serve Cook and refreeze	Discard
Poultry (chicken, turkey, Cornish hen)	Refreeze	Cook and serve Cook and refreeze	Discard
Organ Meats (liver, kidney, heart)	Use within 48 hours DO NOT REFREEZE	Cook and serve	Discard
Fish and Shellfish	Refreeze	Cook and serve Cook and refreeze	Discard
Combination Dishes (stews, casseroles, meat pies)	Cook and Serve Cook and refreeze – only when containing raw ingredients	Cook and serve	Discard
Dairy Items (milk, cheese, butter)	Refreeze	Refreeze or refrigerate	Discard
Produce (vegetables, fruit)	Refreeze	Cook and serve Cook and refreeze	Discard
Juice	Refreeze	Refreeze	Discard
Baked Goods (bread, fruit pies, plain cakes)	Refreeze	Refreeze	Discard

**Do not refreeze previously cooked dishes*

Cold Storage Guidelines: For refrigerators and freezers

Use these time limit guidelines to help keep refrigerated and frozen food safe to eat.

	Refrigerator 4°C (40°F)	Freezer -18°C (0°F)
Fresh Meat		
Beef—steaks, roasts	2-4 days	10-12 months
Pork—chops, roasts	2-4 days	8-12 months
Lamb—chops, roasts	2-4 days	8-12 months
Veal roasts	3-4 days	8-12 months
Ground meat	1-2 days	2-3 months
Fresh Poultry		
Chicken, turkey—whole	2-3 days	1 year
Chicken, turkey—pieces	2-3 days	6 months
Fresh Fish		
Lean fish (i.e., cod, flounder)	3-4 days	6 months
Fatty fish (i.e., salmon)	3-4 days	6 months
Shellfish (clams, crab, lobster)	12-24 hours	2-4 months
Scallops, shrimp, cooked shellfish	1-2 days	2-4 months
Ham		
Canned ham	6-9 months	Don't Freeze
Bacon and Sausage		
Bacon	1 week	1 month
Sausage, raw (pork, beef, turkey)	1-2 days	1-2 months
Pre-cooked, smoked links or patties	1 week	1-2 months
Hot Dogs and Lunch Meats		
Hot dogs	2 weeks	1-2 months
Lunch meats	2 weeks	1-2 months
TV Dinners / Frozen Casseroles		
Keep frozen until ready to serve		3-4 months
Eggs		
Fresh — in shell	3-4 weeks	Don't freeze
Fresh — out of shell	2-4 days	4 months
Hardcooked	1 week	Doesn't freeze well
Egg substitutes	10 days	Don't freeze

Cold Storage Guidelines

Refrigerator
4°C (40°F)

Freezer
-18°C (0°F)

Dairy products		
Milk	Check best before date	6 weeks
Cottage cheese	Check best before date	Doesn't freeze well
Yogurt	Check best before date	1-2 months
Butter—salted	8 weeks	1 year
unsalted		3 months
Cheese		
soft	1 week	Doesn't freeze well
semi-soft	2-3 weeks	8 weeks
firm	5 weeks	3 months
hard	10 months	Up to a year
processed	Several months	3 months
Commercial mayonnaise		
(Refrigerate after opening)	2 months	Don't freeze
Vegetables		
Beans, green or waxed	5 days	8 months
Carrots	2 weeks	10-12 months
Celery	2 weeks	10-12 months
Lettuce, leaf	3-7 days	Don't freeze
Lettuce, iceberg	1-2 weeks	Don't freeze
Spinach	2-4 days	10-12 months
Squash, summer	1 week	10-12 months
Squash, winter	2 weeks	10-12 months
Tomatoes	Not recommended	2 months

Guidelines for Evaluating Boxed and Dry Packaged Containers



Discard if any of the following are found:

- 1. Box is already opened**
- 2. Insects, insect skins, webs, chaff or moving pieces can be seen**
- 3. Box is torn, leaking, or contaminated**
- 4. Seals are imperfect**
- 5. Mould on product/packaging or foreign objects found inside**



If in doubt, throw it out!

Guidelines for Evaluating Glass or Plastic Food Containers

Loose cap or bulged safety seal

Dirt, webs, insect skins or evidence of submersion or leaks on screws

Foreign objects or unusual product separation

Cracks or chips

Incomplete, missing or illegible labels

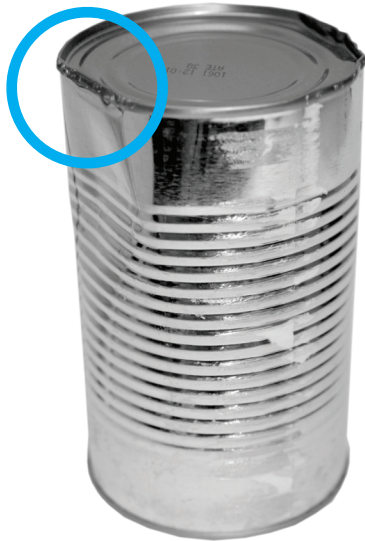
Mold (which can be long, stringy, clumpy or ropy; often white or dark)



Home canned goods are not acceptable.
Discard.

If in doubt, throw it out!

Serious Can Defects



**Dented at junction
of side and end**



**Sharp dent or
dent on seam**



Swollen or bulging



Pitted rust or leaking

*Cans with any of these defects may be unsafe.
Discard them!*

Serious Jar Defects



Inner seal or tamper resistant tape missing or broken



Dirt under the rim



Crooked lid, vacuum button raised, other evidence that cap has been opened



Leaking, crack or chips, or product discoloured

*Jars with any of these defects may be unsafe.
Discard them!*

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