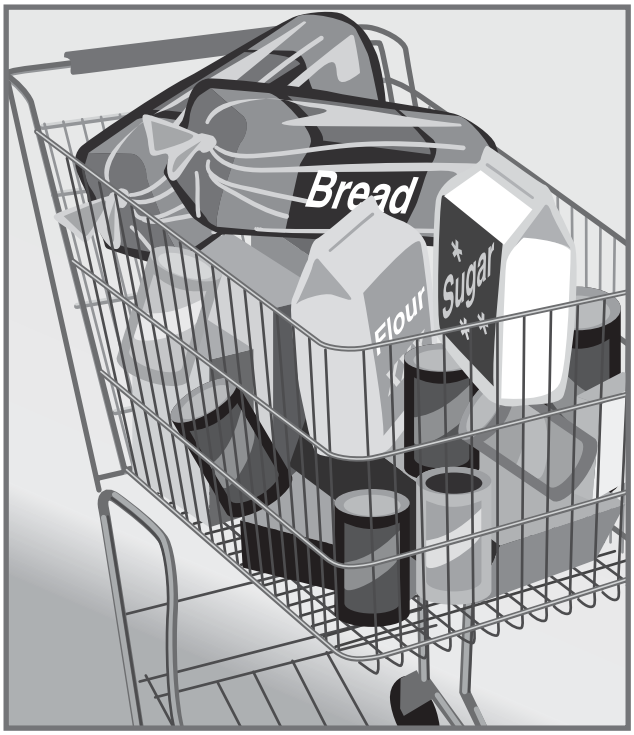
Food Safety Guidelines for Food Banks



HKPR Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit

FOOD SAFETY GUIDELINES
FOR FOOD BANKS

These guidelines are the result of a collaboration between community food providers (food banks) and Public Health Inspectors/Environmental Health Officers throughout the province. Providing a safe food supply for our community is the goal for all involved in this process. The partnership created a guideline that can be used as a resource for both new and existing banks.

All the agencies involved in creating this guideline have acknowledged the need for a reference document to assist the food banks with their operations.

Food banks are unique in that they have very different needs than other food service/retail premises. Food banks rely mainly on donations; with that comes a whole variety of issued. The source of the food varies. The history of the food may be unknown. How was the food stored? How long was the food stored? The staff/volunteers are constantly changing. There's also a greater likelihood of poorer health status of the consumer e.g., elderly, immune-compromised, nutrition deficiencies, etc.

The materials contained in this guideline are designed to be used as a resource for training staff and volunteers. Feel free to copy, enlarge posters, laminate, etc. The intent is to share information on food safety, and help to ensure that the food items being distributed by our food banks are safe for their consumers.

How to use these guidelines

1) Ask all staff/volunteers to read them from cover to cover.

2) Photocopy posters, tip sheets and keep handy
   (e.g., post on wall, in reference binder, laminate, etc.)

3) Incorporate into staff/volunteer training or refresher programs.

A. Introduction

In recent years, food banks have been established in order to meet a very important need: to provide adequate amounts of nutritious food to people who don't have sufficient means to buy it themselves. Hunger in children is of particular importance, for without nutritious food their development and learning potential will fall short of other children. As well, it is widely recognized that if hunger is left unattended, dire social consequences will result.

While it is important to feed the hungry, it is equally important to make sure that food distributed to the hungry is safe to consume. Unfortunately, the objective of offering the safest food possible may at times differ from the objective of providing the most food possible. Clearly, a balance must be struck. The following guidelines are intended to assist food banks in striking this important balance without compromising acceptable safety precautions associated with handling and distribution.

B. Definitions

food bank means a non-profit organization that

a) operates with the exclusive intent of feeding the hungry, and
b) receives, holds, packages, repackages and distributes food to be consumed off the premises, but does not process food.

process means to make food ready-to-eat and includes cooking reheating and reprocessing of previously processed food.

soup kitchen means a non-profit organization that

a) operates with the exclusive intent of feeding the hungry, and
b) receives, holds and processes food to be consumed on the premises.

temperature abuse means the storage of perishable or hazardous foods at incorrect temperatures.

C. Application of Guidelines

These guidelines apply to food banks, but not to soup kitchens or similar facilities where food is consumed onsite. These guidelines may be viewed on the Internet at: http://www.hkpr.on.ca

Some food banks may conduct onsite kitchen workshops or training seminars to teach clients how to cook nutritious and inexpensive meals. Health Units support these innovative approaches that foster self-reliance. While these guidelines do not apply to this aspect of the food bank operation, the appropriate Health Unit should be contacted prior to establishing such a program. The Health Unit will provide advice on the facilities and equipment required, and is able to provide safe food handling instruction. The Public Health Inspector (PHI) from your local Health Unit may refer to these guidelines during inspections.

D. General Principles/Recommended Practices

Regardless of which food-types (see following sections) the food bank handles, the following principles and recommended practices should be followed:

1. Construction/Maintenance of Physical Facilities

For new operations, the physical facility should be reviewed with the local PHI who can provide advice on its appropriateness, and tips on improvements to ensure the safe handling of food.

- Floors, walls and ceilings should be kept in good repair.
- Lighting should be adequate in hand-washing areas, toilet rooms and in areas where food or food ingredients are examined, sorted or stored and utensils are cleaned. Consider using shielded lights to protect against broken glass falling onto unpackaged food.
- Food banks should be ventilated well enough so that condensation does not form and drip onto food or food preparation surfaces.
- Food should not be stored under plumbing pipes or other pipes that could leak their contents onto food or food preparation surfaces.
- All food products should be stored at least 6 inches (15 cm) above the floor to prevent contamination.

2. Equipment and Utensils

Equipment and utensils used for handling and storing food, and all surfaces that come into contact with food (e.g., counter tops) should be made of non-toxic, non-corrosive materials and should be easily cleanable. Equipment should be installed and maintained to facilitate cleaning, and be kept in good repair. Utensils and food contact surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned, and where necessary, sanitized before being used.

For dishwashing by hand, a minimum of a two-compartment sink and a handwashing sink are required in areas where food will be re-portioned or otherwise handled:

1/2 ounce (15 ml) of chlorine (bleach) per gallon (4.5L) of water is required (100 ppm). Test strips are to be used to confirm proper concentration.

The same concentration of sanitizer can be used for surface sanitizing.

For dishes and utensils being cleaned using mechanical dishwashing:

100 ppm chlorine, 200 ppm quaternary ammonia or 25 ppm iodine for low temperature dishwashers.

High temperature dishwashers must be able to read 82°C during the sanitizing cycle.

PHI's can supply additional information regarding the different methods of sanitizing and measuring sanitizer concentrations. Proper test strips should be readily available to allow volunteers to check the sanitizer concentration during the operation.

- All other surfaces and equipment should be cleaned at such intervals as necessary. Equipment and utensils should be handled in a manner that protects them from contamination.

- All single service articles (disposable paper/plastic cutlery, etc. should be used only once.

3. Personal Hygiene

All employees or volunteers that work in direct contact with food (e.g., repackaging) should:

- maintain a high degree of personal cleanliness;

- wear clean outer garments and some form of hair restraint;

- wash their hands and exposed portions of their arms thoroughly in an adequate handwashing facility before starting work, and as often as necessary, especially after smoking, eating, or handling raw meat or poultry;

- not resume work after visiting the toilet without first washing their hands;

- avoid eating food, drinking beverages or using tobacco in any form in areas where food is exposed or in areas used for washing equipment or utensils.

No person should work in the food bank while ill with a disease that is communicable through food (e.g., Hepatitis A). Operators of food banks should be particularly vigilant with regard to persons with symptoms such as diarrhea, vomiting, jaundice, or infected cuts/boils.

4. Protecting Food from Spoilage and Contamination

Food must be protected from physical, chemical, and microbiological contamination at all times. All potentially hazardous foods must be maintained at a safe temperature - less than 4°C (40°F) or greater than 60°C (140°F) (see Category 3 in Section E, for examples of potentially hazardous foods).

To ensure that potentially hazardous foods are not temperature-abused, the following temperatures must be maintained:

- **refrigeration temperatures 4°C (40°F) or colder**
- **frozen food temperature -18°C (0°F) or colder**

Potentially hazardous food must not be permitted to remain in the "Danger Zone" between 4°C (40° F) and 60° C (140° F) for more than two hours. Poisonous and toxic materials (e.g. cleaning chemicals) should be identified and handled under conditions that will not contaminate food or constitute a hazard to employees or volunteer help.

5. Labeling

Because many people have food allergies or sensitivities, ingredient labels are required for products that are broken down into smaller units or repackaged.

If the product that is being repackaged has an expiry/best before date, this date must be transferred or copied onto the repackaged item.

6. Salvageable Food

Salvageable food should be properly stored and segregated from non-salvageable food to prevent contamination of the food available for distribution.

Foods donated as a result of flood, fire, smoke damage, etc. should not be accepted. It can be very difficult to determine the damage to the food by looking at it. Should you have any questions, make sure that you contact your local Public Health Inspector for advice.

7. Sanitary Facilities and Controls

Toilet facilities including rooms and fixtures should be kept in clean condition and in good repair at all times. These rooms should not open directly into an area where unpackaged food is handled or stored. Food banks should have adequate, conveniently located hand washing facilities which are equipped with liquid soap in a dispenser and single-service toweling or other effective hand-drying devices.

8. Garbage and Refuse

All refuse should be kept in leak-proof, non-absorbent containers, which should be kept covered with tight-fitting lids when stored, or not in continuous use. Each container room or storage area should be thoroughly cleaned after the emptying or removal of refuse. All refuse should be disposed of often enough to prevent contamination of the salvaged food product and surrounding processing areas.

9. Insect, Rodent and Animal Control

Effective measures should be taken to prevent rodents, insects, pests and other animals from entering the food bank. Contact a licensed pest control operator for assistance.

10. Vehicles

Vehicles used to transport food should be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition to protect food from contamination. Keep all foods covered. Use clean containers/packaging for transporting (i.e. boxes for canned food). Make sure appropriate temperatures are maintained. A vehicle that has been used for transporting refuse must not be used to transport food until it has been thoroughly cleaned.

11. Employee Volunteer Training

To minimize the risk of distributing unsafe foods, it is very important that employees and volunteers, especially those involved in the critical aspects of the food bank operation, are properly trained. This would include, for example, someone making decisions as to which foods are safe for receiving and/or distributing; someone handling potentially hazardous foods; or someone involved in repackaging of foods. Staff trainers should have experience in the food bank or have experience in the food processing or retail food industry; or else draw on staff from your local health unit. Information is also available from your local health unit on such issues as assessing the safety of dented canned goods. (Also see the appendix.) As a minimum, the manager, permanent employees and key volunteers who are present on a regular basis should be encouraged to complete the Food Handler Course. Contact your local PHI for information about courses in your local area.

E. Food-type Categories

Decisions by the food bank manager or operator whether to accept the donated food, and to minimize the risk of distributing unsafe food, depend on a number of factors. The following four categories have been established to help food bank operators determine the relative risks associated with various kinds of foods, and to provide guidance on what precautions should be taken. Category 1 food is viewed as having the lowest risk. Categories 2, 3, and 4 have progressively higher relative risks associated with them.

Category 1: Non-Perishable Foods

This category includes non-perishable foods (items that do not require refrigeration), for example: pre-packaged foods, canned or bottled products and dry goods such as flour, sugar, pasta, breads and pastries (without cream fillings).

Precautions:

- Of particular importance in this category is sorting and identifying cans or jars that may not be safe for consumption. Training is important (see point #11 under General Principles).

- Bulk packages that require breaking down into smaller quantities or repackaging must be accompanied with adequate labelling (see Section D, point #5).

- Some expiry/best before dates are safety-related while others are quality issues. As a rule, potentially hazardous foods (see Category 3) that exceed their expiry/best before date should not be distributed, while for non-potentially hazardous foods individual judgements should be made. If in doubt, throw it out or contact your local Health Unit for advice.

- Commercial food processors and manufacturers usually have toll-free numbers that can be contacted for advice on expiry/best before dates that have been exceeded. This is very important for baby food products and adult nutritional supplements.

- A couple of key contacts are:
  Gerber 1-800-443-7237 Heinz 1-800-268-6641

- If the safety of cans or jars is in question, contact your local health unit for advice.

NOTE: Home canned foods, particularly meat, fish, vegetables and combination foods (i.e., antipasto) should not be accepted due to the risk of botulism poisoning.

Category 2: Low Hazard Perishable Foods

Category 2 foods include low hazard perishable foods such as raw fruit and vegetables.

Precautions:

- It is important that adequate refrigeration facilities equipped with accurate indicating thermometers be available for perishable foods.

- It is important that adequate attention be given to refuse facilities and frequent removal of refuse. Partially spoiled produce can cause serious odour and fly problems in very little time if not handled promptly. Garbage should be stored in covered containers and be removed frequently.

NOTE: It is important that fruits and vegetables that have been sliced or have had their natural coating removed be refrigerated at a temperature of 4°C/40°F or less. Also, unpasteurized juices (not heat-treated) are considered risky food items; they must be boiled before drinking.

Category 3: Potentially Hazardous Foods

This category includes potentially hazardous foods (e.g. dairy products, eggs and egg products, tofu products, meat and meat products) from a commercial processor or retailer or a licensed restaurant, and may involve minor repackaging. (These **do not** include home processed foods or uninspected wild game.)

Precautions:

- Potentially hazardous foods must be kept at a temperature less than 4°C (40°F).

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

- 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 appropriate equipment (e.g. stainless steel equipment, large sinks for washing and sanitizing, hand wash basins) and work areas are important.

- Repackaging should take place in a separate area of the food bank in order to prevent cross-contamination of finished, ready-to-eat food products. Contact your local Public Health Inspector to review and approve this designated area.

- Poultry and poultry products: if large birds are donated and cutting is necessary then precautions should be taken as with the handling and processing of other meat and meat products mentioned above. Particular attention must be given to handling poultry because of Salmonella concerns.

- Meat and poultry may only be donated from an approved source, properly dressed, and if there has been no temperature abuse during storage or transportation.

- Packaging materials used for the finished product should be made of a material that will not contaminate the food product. New packaging should be used for foods that can be eaten without washing (e.g., fruit, vegetables including salad) and bread products.

- 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, depending on the product. A Public Health Inspector can supply advice on storage practices.

- Training of personnel responsible for further processing (e.g., cutting of meat and poultry or how to handle moldy cheese products) is very important. Arrangements should be made with your health unit or other agencies to provide safe food handling courses for your staff.

- Eggs and egg products should be refrigerated. Visibly cracked eggs should be discarded. Ungraded eggs are not allowed.

Category 4: High Risk Foods

Food that has been processed in the home environment, and partially consumed foods from any source are not acceptable. These foods are viewed as being at the highest risk because you cannot tell to what extent partially consumed food has been contaminated or (in the case of home-processed foods) under what conditions the food was originally processed and stored.

- Home preserves (jams, jellies and other high sugar-content type foods) may be accepted as donations and distributed, as long as the product is labeled, unopened (property sealed) and contained in a proper container.

- The following foods are not to be accepted for distribution:
    - unpasteurized dairy products;
    - home-canned vegetables;
    - home-canned meat/fish products or combination products, e.g., antipasto;
    - uninspected wild game, due to the uncertainty of the health of the animal before its death

- In some cases, freezers full of food are donated to food banks (for example, family members of a deceased person may donate the food belonging to the estate). These foods should not be accepted unless assessed by a Public Health Inspector. Again, home-canned vegetables or home-canned meat/fish should never be distributed to clients.

- Partially consumed foods, regardless of whether they are from a commercial processor/ retailer or from the home, may pose a serious risk and should never be accepted as there is no way to assess potentially adulterated foods with foreign matter.

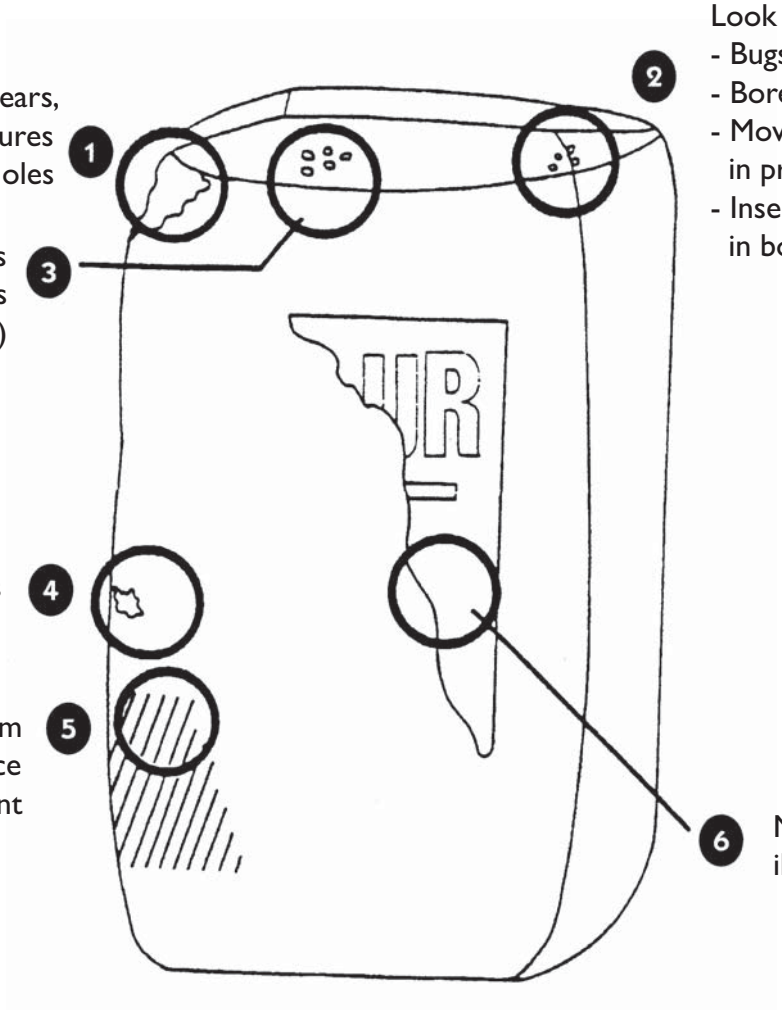
F. Conclusion

The nutrition and hunger needs within a community will vary from time to time, and from community to community. In response to these needs, generous persons and organizations may offer to donate a variety of foods prepared in various locations.

These guidelines have been designed to be used by the management and the staff (volunteer or otherwise) of food banks. Everyone who works in, or donates food to a food bank should read and be familiar with these guidelines. If you need clarification on any aspect of these guidelines, you should contact your local Health Unit.

More information about safe food handling practices can be obtained by attending the Food Safety Course that is provided for a modest cost by the local Health Unit and by many community colleges. The Food Safety Course is strongly recommended for anyone working in a food bank.

Guidelines for Evaluating Bagged and Sacked Food Containers

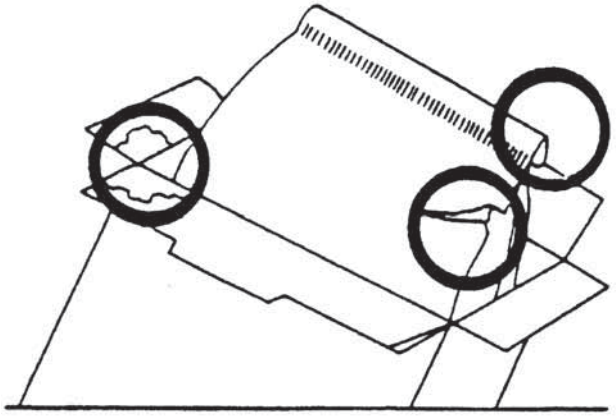


If in doubt, throw it out!

Courtesy Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service

Guidelines for Evaluating Boxed and Dry Packaged Containers

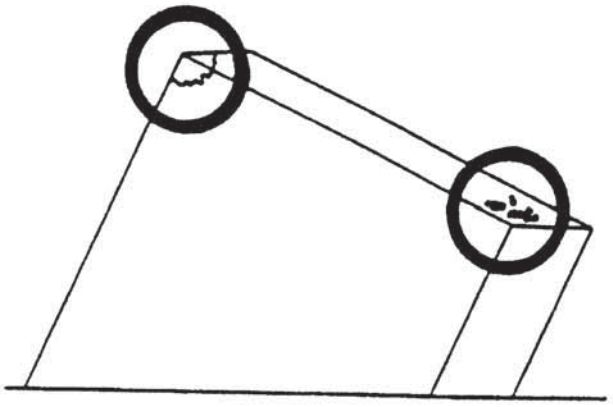
Boxes with Inner Bag



1. Look for contaminates on box
2. Look at inner bag. discard if it is:
   - torn, leaking or contaminated
   - has imperfect or leaking seals
   - has moldy or foreign object inside

To save good inner bags of food from damaged box, place inner bag into plastic bag and insert label.

Boxes without Inner Bag

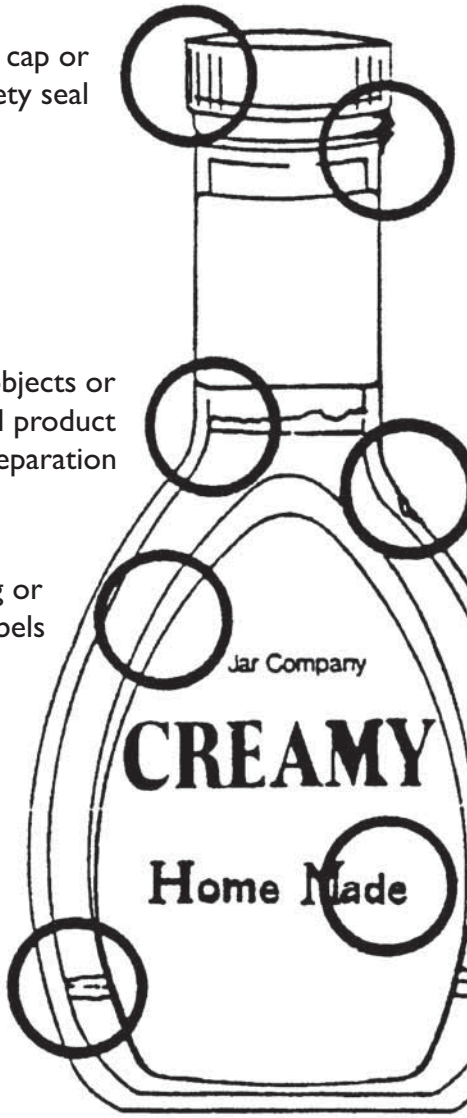


1. Do not use if opened
2. Look for contaminates on box
3. Look for insects, insect skins, webs, chaff or moving pieces

If in doubt, throw it out!

Courtesy Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service

Guidelines for Evaluating Glass 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

Home canned goods

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

If in doubt, throw it out!

Courtesy Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service

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!

Courtesy Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service

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!

Courtesy Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service

Dates on Food Packages - What Do They Mean?

Date labels are common on many types of food packages. But what do they mean? Is it safe for your program to use or distribute food after the date on the package? It depends! Some dates are safety related while others are quality issues.

Best Before Date/ Expiry Date

As a rule, potentially hazardous foods (see Category 3), infant formula and baby foods that exceed their date should not be consumed, while for non-potentially hazardous foods judgements should be made. Examples of products that may extend beyond their Best Before Date would be items such as:

Jams;
Condiments, ketchup, mustard;
Salsa;
Tomato sauce;
Juices;
Salad dressing;
Breads; and low risk baked goods.

Look for signs of spoilage! - mold, off odour, change in texture.

If in doubt, throw it out!

Packaged Dates

Refers to the dates that the store or distributor packages the product. See "Recommended Storage Times" at the back of this booklet.

Look for signs of spoilage! - mold, off odour, change in texture.

Perishable Food Decision Table

Frozen Foods:

Type of food	Partially Frozen (some ice crystals)	Completely Thawed - still cold (below 4°C/40°F)	Completely Thawed - warm (above 4°C/40°F)
Meats (beef, veal, lamb, pork)	Refreeze	Cook and serve Cook and refreeze	Discard
Poultry (chicken, turkey, cornish game hen, etc.)	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*	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
Juices	Refreeze	Refreeze	Discard
Baked Goods (bread, fruit pies, plain cakes)	Refreeze	Refreeze	Serve

* Refreeze only those dishes containing raw ingredients.
Do not refreeze previously cooked dishes.

Recommended Storage Times

People often ask how long food will keep. There is no absolute answer. Shelf life is dependent on many factors including the initial food type and quality, processing and preparation practices, storage temperature and the number and type of bacteria present both before and after processing. Where possible, follow the manufacturer's recommendation indicated by the "best before" date. Otherwise, you may wish to follow the following guidelines.

Maximum Recommended Storage Time for Refrigerated Food (O° - 4°C or 32°- 40°F)

Food	Storage Period (days)
Ground Meat	2-3
Roasts/Steaks	3-5
Bacon/Weiners	6-7
Poultry	2-3
Fish/Shellfish	1-2
Leftover egg yolk/white	1-2
Luncheon Meats	3-5
Leftover cooked meats/gravy	1-2
Stuffing	1-2

Maximum Recommended Storage Time for Frozen Foods (-18°C or 0°F)

Food	Storage Period (months)
Roasts/steaks	3
Bacon/wieners	6
Poultry	3
Giblets	3
Fatty fish (salmon, mackerel)	3
Shellfish	3
Other fish	6
Leftover meats/gravy	3
Precooked combination dishes	6
Bread dough containing yeast	1
Cake batter	4

Maximum Recommended Storage Time for Dry Goods (room temperature)

Food	Storage Period (months)
dry yeast	18
powdered milk	4
canned goods	12
cereal grains	8
spices	24
dry beans	24
dried fruit	8
jams/jellies	12
nuts	12
pickles	12
flour	12

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