

# Food Safety Guidelines

## For Food Banks

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Adapted with permission by the BC Centre for Disease Control



[www.halton.ca/foodsafety](http://www.halton.ca/foodsafety)

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# Food Safety Guidelines For Food Banks

These guidelines are the result of collaboration between community food providers (food banks) and public health officials. 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 food banks.

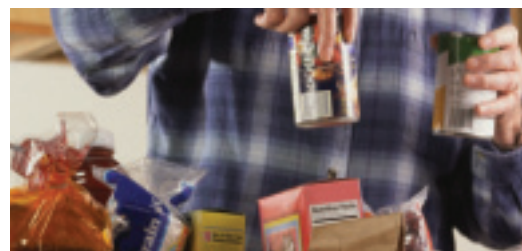
All the agencies involved in creating this guideline have acknowledged the need for a reference document to assist the food banks with their operations.

Food banks are unique in that they have very different needs than other foodservice/retail premises. Food banks rely mainly on donations; with that comes a whole variety of issues. 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.

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).
- 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 do not have sufficient means to buy it themselves.

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:** a non-profit organization that

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

**process:** to make food ready to eat and includes cooking, reheating and reprocessing of previously processed food.

**community kitchen:** 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:** the storage of perishable or hazardous foods at incorrect temperatures.

**HRHD:** Halton Region Health Department

**PHI:** Public Health Inspector

## C Application of Guidelines

These guidelines apply to food banks, but not to community kitchens or similar facilities where food is prepared and consumed onsite. These guidelines may be accessed on the internet in the "People Working in the Food Services Industry" section of [www.halton.ca/foodsafety](http://www.halton.ca/foodsafety).

## 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 Halton Region Health Department for advice and tips on ensuring the safe handling of food.

- o Floors, walls, and ceilings should be kept in good repair.
- o Lighting should be adequate in hand-washing areas, washrooms, 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.
- o Food banks should be ventilated well enough so that condensation does not form and drip onto food or food preparation surfaces.
- o Food should not be stored under plumbing pipes or other pipes that could leak their contents onto food or food preparation surfaces.
- o 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 manual dishwashing a minimum of a two-compartment sink and a designated handwashing sink are required in areas where food will be re-portioned or otherwise handled. A chlorine sanitizing solution must be prepared as follows:

Sanitizing	How to Mix	Solution Strength
Dishes e.g cutting boards, knives, cooking utensils	Mix 1/2 teaspoon of household bleach with one litre of water	100 PPM chlorine solution • immersion
Equipment e.g. large equipment, tables, anything that cannot fit into a sink	Mix one teaspoon of household bleach with one litre of water	200 PPM chlorine solution for sanitizing spray • clean-in-place

## Tips to Remember

- o Make a new sanitizing solution daily.
- o Do not mix bleach with detergent.
- o Using chlorine test strips. Check the strength of the solution.
- o Discard used sanitizing solution as needed. The strength of the solution will be weaker after use.

For dishes and utensils being cleaned by a mechanical dishwasher, sanitizing may be done in a high temperature dishwasher that is able to reach 82°C for 10 seconds during the final rinse, or by one of the following chemical sanitizers for low temperature dishwashers: 100 ppm chlorine solution; 200 ppm quaternary ammonium; or 25 ppm iodine solution.

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 as well as 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) must:

- o Be clean.
- o Wear clean outer garments and some form of hair restraint.
- o Wash their hands before starting work, and as often as necessary, especially after smoking, eating, handling raw meat or poultry, or using the washroom.
- o Not resume work after visiting the toilet without first washing their hands.
- o 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 and volunteers of food banks experiencing diarrhea, vomiting, jaundice, or infected cuts/boils must remain off work until symptoms free for a minimum of 24hrs.

### 4. Protecting Food from Spoilage and Contamination

Food must be protected from physical, chemical, and microbiological contamination at all times. Note there are certain foods, such as milk and egg products, that are at higher risk of spoilage and contamination if not properly stored. They are referred to as potentially hazardous foods. To make sure potentially hazardous foods are not temperature-abused, the following temperatures must be maintained:

- o **Refrigeration storage temperatures** 4°C (40°F) or colder
- o **Frozen food temperature** -18°C (0°F) or colder

**Danger Zone: 4°C (40°F) - 60°C (140°F)**

Potentially hazardous foods must not be permitted in the danger zone for more than two hours.

More information about potentially hazardous foods is found in Category 3, section E (page 7) of this guide.

Poisonous and toxic materials (e.g., cleaning chemicals) should be properly labeled and stored away from food to avoid contamination of foods.

## 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

Foods donated as a result of flood, fire, smoke, etc. are highly hazardous and 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 the HRHD 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 that are equipped with liquid soap in a dispenser and single-service toweling or other effective hand-drying devices.

## 8. Garbage

All garbage should be stored in leak-proof, non-absorbent containers with tight-fitting lids. Each container room or storage area should be thoroughly cleaned after the emptying or removal of garbage. All garbage should be disposed of as often as necessary to maintain the premises in a sanitary manner.

## 9. Insect, Rodent and Animal Control

Effective measures should be taken to prevent rodents, insects, pets and other animals from entering the food bank. A licensed pest control operator must be contacted for assistance as needed.

## 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 (e.g., boxes for tinned food). Make sure appropriate temperatures are maintained.

## 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 training 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 the Halton Region Health Department. Information is also available from the HRHD on such issues such as assessing the safety of dented tinned 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 Safety Education and Certification Program. Contact the HRHD for information about courses in your local area.

## E Food-type Categories

Decisions by the food bank manager or operator as to whether to accept donated food, and to minimize the risk of distributing unsafe food, depend on a number of factors. The following five categories have been established to help food bank operators determine the relative risks associated with various kinds of food, and to provide guidance on what precautions should be taken. Category 1 food is viewed as having the lowest risk. Categories 2, 3, 4, and 5 have progressively higher relative risks associated with them.

### Category 1: Non-perishable Foods

This category includes non-perishable foods (i.e., 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:

- o Of particular importance in this category is sorting and identifying cans or jars that may not be safe for consumption. Training (see point #11 under General Principles) is important.
- o Bulk packages that require breaking down into smaller quantities or repackaging must be accompanied with adequate labeling (see Section D, point #5).
- o 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. For non-potentially hazardous foods, individual judgments should be made. If in doubt, throw it out or contact the HRHD for advice.
- o Commercial food processors and manufacturers usually have 1-800 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.
- o If the safety of cans or jars is in question, contact the HRHD for advice.

**NOTE:** Home canned foods, particularly meat, fish, vegetables and combination foods (e.g., antipasto) must 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 fruits and vegetables.

#### Precautions:

- o It is important that adequate refrigeration facilities be available for perishable foods.
- o 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.



## 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:

- o Potentially hazardous foods must be kept at a temperature less than 4°C (40°F).
- o 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.
- o 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 should be followed.
- o 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 PHI to review and approve this designated area.
- o 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.
- o Meat and poultry may only be donated from an approved source, properly packaged, and if there has been no temperature abuse during storage or transportation.
- o Food grade materials should be used for packaging the finished product.
- o 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. PHIs can supply advice on storage practices.
- o 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 the HRHD to provide safe food handling courses for your staff.
- o Eggs and egg products should be refrigerated. Visibly cracked eggs should be discarded. Only graded eggs should be used.

## 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 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.

### Precautions:

- o The following foods are not to be accepted for distribution:
  - Unpasteurized dairy products
  - Unpasteurized juices
  - Home preserves; e.g., jams, jellies
  - 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
- o 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.
- o Food products that are not identifiable should not be accepted.

## Category 5: Prepared/Cooked Foods

This category includes prepared foods that have not been partially consumed and are donated from a facility that is routinely inspected by the HRHD.

### Precautions:

These foods may be accepted as long as the following conditions are met:

- o The food is from a facility that is routinely inspected by the HRHD
- o Only food that has not been partially consumed is to be accepted
- o Food is in food grade packaging
- o Food is clearly identified by labelling
- o Food does not show signs of thawing or freezer burn
- o Food has not been reheated
- o Food that is accepted must be received at the following temperatures, -18°C or less, 4°C or less, or 60°C or more
- o Food must be maintained at these temperatures until served/given away
- o Detailed temperature logs are maintained

## 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 the HRHD.

The Food Safety Education and Certification program is provided by the HRHD and is strongly recommended for anyone working/volunteering in a food bank.

# Guidelines for Evaluating

# Guidelines for Evaluating Bagged and Sacked Food Containers

**Rips, tears, punctures or holes**

**Insect damage**

Look carefully for:

- Bugs in seams
- Bore holes
- Movement or spot in products
- Insect skins or chaff in bottom of container

**Rodent gnaw marks**

**Rodent droppings or urine stains**

**Missing or illegible label**

**Spills or stains from any unknown source or any contaminant**



**If in doubt, throw it out!**

# 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. Mouldy or foreign objects are 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!**



# 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 related to safety while others are related to 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 judgments 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
- low-risk baked goods

Look for signs of spoilage! – mold, off odor, change in texture.

## If in doubt, throw it out!

## **Packaged Dates**

Refers to the date 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 odor, change in texture.

# Perishable Food Decision Table

## Frozen Foods:

Type of Food	Partially Frozen (some ice crystals)	Completely Thawed – still cold (below 40°F)	Completely Thawed – warm (above 40°F)
<b>Meats</b> (beef, veal, lamb pork)	Refreeze	Cook and serve Cook and refreeze	Discard
<b>Poultry</b> (chicken, turkey, cornish game hen, etc.)	Refreeze	Cook and serve Cook and refreeze	Discard
<b>Organ Meats</b> (liver, kidney, heart)	Use within 48 hours DO NOT REFREEZE	Cook and serve	Discard
<b>Fish and Shellfish</b>	Refreeze	Cook and serve Cook and refreeze	Discard
<b>Combination Dishes</b> (stews, casseroles, meat pies)	Cook and serve Cook and refreeze*	Cook and serve	Discard
<b>Dairy Items</b> (milk, cheese, butter)	Refreeze	Refreeze or refrigerate	Discard
<b>Produce</b> (vegetables, fruit)	Refreeze	Cook and serve Cook and refreeze	Discard
<b>Juices</b>	Refreeze	Refreeze	Discard
<b>Baked Goods</b> (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 a 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 manufacturers' recommendation indicated by the "best before" date. Otherwise, you may wish to follow the following guidelines.

## Maximum Recommended Storage Time for Refrigerated Food (0°-4°C or 32°-40°F)

FOOD	STORAGE PERIOD (DAYS)
Ground meat	2 - 3
Roasts/steaks	3 - 5
Bacon/wieners	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

For a more detailed listing of products and storage recommendations, visit [www.eatrightontario.ca](http://www.eatrightontario.ca) and search "Food Handler Storage Guide".



## **Halton Region**

1151 Bronte Road  
Oakville, Ontario, Canada, L6M 3L1

Dial 311 or 905-825-6000  
1-866-4HALTON (1-866-442-5866)  
TTY 905-827-9833

[www.halton.ca](http://www.halton.ca)