

Giving back to the community with food safety in mind

Everyone deserves the right to safe food that will not make them sick. Irrespective of their financial circumstances. Environmental Health Officers work hard to make sure food poisoning outbreaks are prevented through their day-to-day work which includes proactive food hygiene inspections and public education programmes. Checks are carried out at all stages of the food chain at many different establishments. From hotels to schools and non-profit organisations to make sure food is handled, stored and prepared safely.

At food banks the charitable sector has made tremendous efforts to support islanders in need both during and before Covid. Organisations provide a much-needed service including vulnerable people who may be living with disabilities or health issues. Vulnerable people are those who are a higher risk of developing more serious complications after food poisoning. These people are over 65 years of age, pregnant women, children under 5 and people with long-term medical conditions.

This guidance has been written with food safety in mind for food banks. Giving back to the community whilst protecting some of our most vulnerable islanders.

All food provided to the public in Jersey for either profit or for charity needs to be prepared safely and meet Jersey Food Law standards. Food handlers need only a suitable level of knowledge and understanding of how to handle food safely.

Registration as a Food Business

Almost everyone who is offering food on a regular and organised basis to the public for a charitable cause or for profit needs to be registered with Environmental and Consumer Protection. This includes individuals who are setting up a food bank or a community operation providing food.

Existing food entities who are making significant changes to what they do are required to let the Department know. For instance:

- A Parish Hall who previously only sold pre-packaged cakes a couple of times a year at community events is now running a weekly food bank.
- A home-baker who was previously making wedding cakes at home is now preparing meals to be given out at a weekly food bank.

Changing food operations will need a change in thinking as to how the level of risk is safely managed. An Environmental Health Officer can help you manage this risk and enable you to carry on with your chosen food activity in a safe manor.

Many different entities are registered including (not an exhaustive list) food banks, Parish Halls, home caterers, restaurants, hotels, cafes, shops, supermarkets, staff canteens, guest houses, kiosks, and ice cream vans. At present, registration is free of charge and a food registration forms can be accessed [here](#).

Dry store cupboard food suggested checks

All food donated to the food bank needs to be safe to eat. The volunteers working at the food bank should have enough knowledge and experience to carry out basic checks on the food that is donated, for example:

- Cans are not dented
- Labels are easy to read and intact
- The primary packaging is not damaged
- Food has not been decanted from its original packaging into another container at home.
- Allergen information is included on the label
- Fruit and vegetables are fit to eat

In some instances, food may be offered to food banks and charities by larger retailers where the outer packaging is slightly damaged leaving the inner packaging intact. This may be acceptable, as long as that internal wrapping is intact, and the food is protected.

Best Before dates

The best before date relates to the quality of the food and not its safety. For this reason, it is acceptable to receive food into food banks after its 'best before' date.

The quality of the food may deteriorate but it should be safe for a time after this date. Best before dates are on a large range of different food items to include frozen foods, dried foods and tinned foods. Please remember, the best before date will only be accurate if the food manufacturers instructions listed on the label have been followed.

The best before date is sometimes listed as a best before end date (BBE).

Eggs are an exception to this rule and must always be eaten before their best before date.

Refrigerated/chilled food suggested checks

Accepting donated food that has come from a fridge or a freezer requires controls to manage food safety. All perishable food items must be stored in the refrigerator at under 8°C. Frozen food items must be stored at -18°C

- It is recommended that the goods be transported in suitable clean temperature-controlled conditions.
- A temperature probe can be used to check food is under 8°C by volunteers on arrival.
- Labels must be easy to read and intact.
- Food must not have been decanted from its original packaging into another container at home.
- Allergen information is included on the label.

If you are not confident that the food has been handled and stored in a safe way, then it is best to only accept lower risk ambient store cupboard dry food from that individual.

Use by dates

A 'use by' date relates to food safety and is the most important date to remember.

'Use by' dates are on foods that deteriorate quickly and will support the growth of harmful bacteria. Examples of such foods include quiches, meat products and ready-to-eat salads and sandwiches.

It is very important that food is not accepted into the food bank past its use by date. Even if you would eat it at home and it looks ok, eating food past its use by date could make people sick with food poisoning.

You can't see, smell or taste bacteria that causes food poisoning. Giving out food to vulnerable islanders which has past its use-by-date puts them at risk of food poisoning. Vulnerable people may be more susceptible to food poisoning, leading to hospitalisation and/or longer-term complications.

For the use-by-date to be an acceptable guide, the storage instructions written on the label must be followed carefully. For instance, if the instructions on the label state the food must be kept in a refrigerator under 5°C and the food item has been kept warmer and above this temperature, then this would make the use-by-date invalid.

The only exception to this is if the food has gone through either a cooking or freezing process before the use by date has passed. Where this has happened, the food needs to be re-labelled to show how it can be safely prepared and stored.

Storing food once it has been accepted at the food bank

Once the food has been checked it must also be stored safely. It is always important to follow the food manufacturers storage instructions. All dry store cupboard food must be kept off the floor. Home-made food and refrigerated/chilled food must be kept in the freezer or the refrigerator, as necessary.

It is recommended that fridge and freezer temperatures are monitored to ensure the correct temperatures are being achieved. Recording these temperatures forms part of your food safety management system and goes towards proving one method of how you keep food safe.

Dry store cupboard food must be kept in a place where it is free from possible contaminants to include any potential pests such as rats, mice, and cockroaches. It is recommended that packets of food are not kept in garages as these areas are rarely pest proofed. Remember, if a pencil can fit through a hole in the wall, so can a mouse.

Meal containers

If the food bank chooses to provide food in containers, then it is important that clean food grade containers are used. This type of packaging is manufactured for multiple uses and examples include Tupperware or takeaway boxes. This will ensure that the food is safe in transit and it remains free from anything falling into it.

Food grade packaging material may be required to be liquid repellent to stop sauces leaking out of the packaging or to stop paper becoming soaked through. When food grade packaging is not used, chemical contaminants or germs can be transferred onto the food. The containers need to have properly fitting lids to maintain good food hygiene and reduce risk of spillage

Glass and plastic containers can be re-used, however you must carefully check them for any cracks or chips before use. It is recommended that all containers must be thoroughly cleaned in a dishwasher.

Homemade food

There is no rule banning the sale of homemade food at food banks. However, it is higher risk and it still needs to be safe to eat. The people who make the food must follow good hygiene practice and the food needs to be stored and transported safely. People who prepare food at home on a regular basis may have to register as a food business with Department. Please contact us for more information.

Home bakers should follow these steps:

- Wash and dry hands before preparing food and regularly throughout preparation.
- Care to ensure all surfaces, bowls, utensils, and any other equipment are firstly clean of debris and then sanitised.
- Raw eggs are not used in anything that won't be thoroughly cooked such as mayonnaise, icing or mousse.
- Cakes and desserts containing cream or butter icing are stored in the fridge.
- Meals are stored in a clean, sealable containers, away from raw foods, especially raw meat.
- If food is prepared in advance and frozen, care must be taken to ensure the food is properly defrosted before its used.
- Fresh fruit and vegetables are washed.
- Raw and ready-to-eat foods are kept separate.
- Food past its "use-by" date is not used – as a main dish or form part of any ingredient
- Food is kept out of the fridge for the shortest time possible.
- All food manufacturer cooking instructions are followed ensuring food is properly cooked all the way through.
- Anyone who is donating homemade food should label it including the following information: what the item is, the date it was produced, details of any allergens.

On the day, people bringing in food from home to the food bank:

- Transport food in clean, sealable containers.
- Wash hands often.
- Leave food outside the fridge for as limited a time as possible.
- Use tongs when handling and serving food.

It is recommended that the food bank operator receives assurance from the people making food at home that good food hygiene practice is being followed by producing a food safety policy. This policy is then signed and understood by all and provides a written agreement between the food business operator and the people making the home-made food that all hygiene measures are followed.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does everyone need to be trained to handle food in the food bank?

No not necessarily. Staff should be either trained or supervised dependant on their specific work activity.

Do I need to have a food safety management system?

It is not yet a legal requirement to have a food safety management system in Jersey. However, it is strongly recommended that you produce one. It demonstrates how you look after food safely, acts as a staff training tool and protects the reputation of the food business operator.

All the profits from the event go to charity; surely, I do not need to do all of this extra work when all the money will be going to a good cause.

Running charity events does not negate the need to follow good hygiene practice and comply with the Food Law. All food served to the public needs to be safe to eat.

I run a monthly event selling homemade food. Are we responsible for any illnesses resulting from something eaten?

Yes, if it is proven that food eaten at your event caused the food poisoning incident. This may involve an investigation by Environmental Health Officers to find out the cause. Any food business operator supplying food to the public has a responsibility to make sure they are doing all they can to ensure food is prepared safely.

Do we need to wear gloves when serving food?

No, you do not need to. If you choose to wear gloves they must be changed frequently.

Wearing gloves must not replace thorough hand washing and drying.

We are serving food outside, how can we wash hands?

You can purchase a portable hand wash unit, many of which are available online. There must be hand washing and drying facilities where food is being prepared and served. The exception to this is when all food items are sealed, this may well be the case if your food bank only accepts dry store cupboard goods.

Do we need to ban food containing nuts?

The food bank operator needs to make a responsible decision as to whether it is necessary to ban nuts or not. For example, if the premises where the food

bank operates is used for a mother and baby group where some of the children are known to be allergic to nuts, banning nuts would be sensible. Minimising cross-contamination from other foods will need to be managed to reduce any potential risk of accidental exposure to food allergens.

Can I give out homemade jam in re-used jam jars at the food bank?

It is safe to re-use glass jam jars occasionally, on the proviso that they have been sufficiently cleaned. They need to be free from chips and cracks and should be sterilised before use. The lids also need to be tightly fitting.

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