Connecticut Foodshare

Our Community, Our Food Bank

Food Safety Training for Mobile Pantry

Why is Food Safety Important?

According to the Centers for Disease Control, 48 million people get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die from food-borne diseases each year in the United States.

Even though pantries do not prepare meals, care must *ALWAYS* be taken when providing food to the public, especially to populations with a high susceptibility to food-borne illnesses, including:

- Infants, children, the elderly, pregnant women
- Individuals who are undernourished, physically disabled, or have weakened immune systems.

Donated product needs special care because:

- It is often handled by more people in its lifetime than purchased product.
- It is harder to establish that everyone handling donated food has handled it appropriately.
- It is most likely closer to code date than purchased product.

In the event someone becomes ill from food that your program provided, it is important that your organization can demonstrate that proper food safety procedures have been followed.

How Food Becomes Unsafe - Hazards from the Environment

1. Biological hazards such as bacteria, viruses, parasites, and fungi can't be seen, tasted, or smelled and can contaminate food. These are called pathogens.

    - Pathogens grow quickly when frozen and refrigerated food stays too long in the **Temperature Danger Zone - (41° F - 135° F);** this is called time-temperature abuse.

2. Chemical hazards such as cleaning products, sanitizers, pest control poisons, etc. can contaminate food.

3. Physical hazards such as dirt or rust on top of cans, metal shavings, glass fragments, animal droppings, insect casings, etc. can contaminate food.

Good Personal Hygiene – Your Role in Keeping Food Safe

Handwashing is the most important part of personal hygiene. It is important because your hands can transfer pathogens to food. So, it is critical that you wash your hands correctly and at the correct times.

How to Wash Your Hands

1. Wet hands with clean, running water, as hot as you can comfortably stand, and apply soap.
2. Lather hands by rubbing them together with the soap.
3. Scrub hands at least 20 seconds. Clean under fingernails, between fingers, and wrists.
4. Rinse hands under clean running warm water.
5. Dry hands with a clean towel or air-dry them. DO NOT use any part of your clothing.
6. Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet.
7. Use a paper towel to open the restroom door.

Using Hand Sanitizers

Some agencies may provide hand sanitizer to reduce pathogens on hands. Follow these steps if you use hand sanitizer.

1. **NEVER** use hand sanitizer instead of washing your hands.
2. Use hand sanitizer after you wash your hands.
3. Wait for hand sanitizer to dry before touching food or equipment, and before putting on gloves.
4. Follow the manufacturer's directions for using hand sanitizer.

When to Wash Your Hands

1. After using the restroom. Failure to do this has caused many foodborne illnesses.
2. After touching your hair, face, or body.
3. After touching clothing or aprons.
4. After taking out the garbage.
5. After handling chemicals that can make food unsafe.
6. After chewing gum or tobacco.
7. Before putting on gloves at the start of a new task.
8. After sneezing, coughing, or using a tissue.
9. After Smoking.
10. After eating or drinking.
11. After touching anything else that may contaminate your hands. Examples include a mop bucket, dirty work surfaces, and cloths.
12. After leaving and returning to the food-handling area.

Allergen Control –Someone's Life Depends on it!

There are over 170 different foods that cause allergic reactions. Of these, only **NINE** are reported as causing over 90% of all food allergy reactions.

A food allergen is any product or ingredient containing proteins that can cause an immune system reaction in a person who has food allergies.

When a person eats a food item they are allergic to, their body treats the allergen as an invader and reacts against it. The amount of food allergen that people can tolerate varies. Because of this, reactions are not the same for all people.

- People with mild food allergies may be able to eat small amounts of the product and experience only slight discomfort.
    - Some examples of mild allergic reactions are itchy skin and rashes, hives, abdominal pain, dizziness, diarrhea, vomiting, wheezing, swelling.
- On the other hand, people with severe food allergies can be affected by simply touching or smelling the food. A severe, whole-body reaction is called anaphylaxis or anaphylactic shock. These reactions can be life-threatening.
    - Severe reaction may also include difficulty breathing, seizures, drop in blood pressure unconsciousness, decrease in blood flow throughout the body, death.

Preventing Food Allergen Contamination:

- All food given to clients must contain a label that lists specific information about the product, including ingredients and any possible allergens.
- When possible, store food with allergens separately from allergen-free products. **DO NOT** store allergens **above** allergen-free foods. Use dedicated pallets and bins for products containing allergens.
- Clean and sanitize all surfaces that have come in contact with food containing an allergen.
- If you suspect a food has been contaminated, it should be discarded.
- Wash hands and change gloves after handling a food containing allergens and before handling allergen-free food.

Proper Food Storage

Access to food storage areas should be limited to authorized staff and volunteers who have an awareness of food safety issues.

Remember: food can only be stored in locations that have been inspected and approved by Connecticut Foodshare.

Dry storage areas should be clean, dry, and pest-free:

- Clean storage areas regularly.
- Storage areas should be well ventilated.
- Keep the dry-storage environment between 50° and 70° F with humidity less

than 60%
    - If there is a “musty” smell or condensation on walls, install a dehumidifier.
- Pest Control:
    - Keep records of professional pest inspections and document what steps were taken if evidence of pests was discovered.
    - Ensure that all access points for pests and vermin are sealed.
    - Store cereals, grains, sugar & flour in airtight containers to prevent infestations.

Food should be stored at least 6 inches above the ground, 6 inches from the ceiling (18 inches if there is a sprinkler system), and 4 inches away from the walls. These standards will:

- Prevent product from contamination should there be minor flooding.
- Reduce pest access.
- Allow for easier cleaning.

Do not store product:

- Beneath water or sewer lines
- Near heat sources such as ovens, forced air vents, or furnaces.
- Near windows that receive direct sunlight

Separate dry-storage product from chemicals:

- Store cleaning products and other chemicals in a separate room from food storage
- If this is not possible, store such items on a separate set of shelves.
- Never store cleaning products or chemicals above food items

Maintain **cold-storage units** appropriately:

- Ensure that **refrigerators** are holding temperatures **between 33° F and 40°**
    - Below 33° F and product may freeze
    - Above 40° F **(41° F - 135° F)** is the **Temperature Danger Zone**.
        - Colonies of bacteria that cause food-borne illness can double in 20 minutes if food is stored in this zone.

Ensure that **freezers** are holding temperatures **below 0° F.**

- Food stored 32° F and below may appear to be frozen, but certain yeasts and bacteria can continue to grow at 15° F.
- Record cold storage temperatures at least once a week or more frequently if possible
    - Best practice is to record temperatures whenever program staff/volunteers are on site.
- Clean and/or defrost all cold storage units at least quarterly.
- Do not overfill your cold storage units or place product too close to vents; cold air must be able to circulate throughout the entire unit.
- To identify loss of power in the freezer, place a penny on top of water frozen in a bottle; if the penny sinks over time, the freezer has stopped working at some point.
    - If you cannot determine how long meat has remained unfrozen, *discard it*

immediately.

- Meat that has been in a full but non-functional freezer (such as during a power outage) for *less than four hours* can be refrozen and distributed.

Evaluating Product Fitness:

Dates are printed on many food items, but product dating is not required by federal regulations except on infant formula.

Closed dates, packing numbers, or Julian date codes appear as a series of letters and/or numbers created by the manufacturer:

- Usually appear on shelf-stable products such as cans or boxes.
- Refer to the date or time of manufacture, not product expiration.
- Enable manufacturers to rotate their stock.
- Enable manufacturers to locate product in the event of a recall.

Calendar Dates help stores determine how long to display product for sale:

- Relate to the peak quality of food, not product safety.
- Found primarily on perishable foods, such as dairy, eggs, meat, and poultry.

Three common types of code dates:

- **"Best if Used By"** recommended for best flavor or quality, not a purchase or safety date.
- **"Sell-by"** date tells the store how long to display the product for sale; the product is still safe to eat past this date.
- **"Use By"** the last date recommended for use of the product while at peak quality; the product is still safe to eat past this date.

Generally, it is safe to distribute most products past these code dates; in some instances, product color, taste, or nutritional content may be affected.

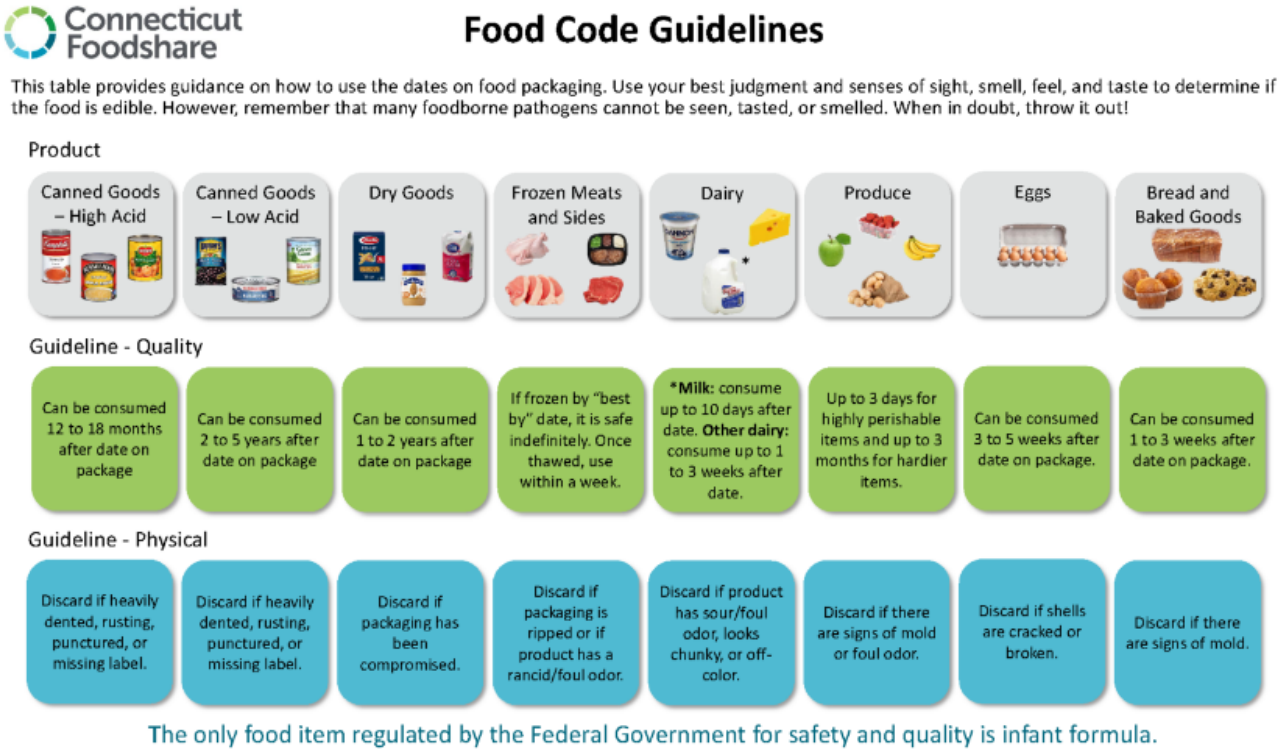
The only exception is infant formula which cannot be distributed past the use-by date and must be discarded. It is best practice to follow this guideline for baby food as well.

Based on product type, available code dates, or when the product was received, you should determine a *safe last date for distribution*. Marking that date on the product will make it easier to know which products to distribute first and when products need to be discarded. In most cases it is easiest to mark the date the product was received, especially on cases of food.

Information on safe code date extensions for different product types can be found on our

Food Code Guidelines document on our website. Ask your Network Relations Representative for a poster to display at your site.

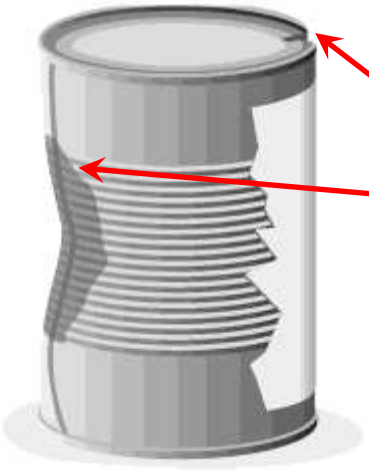
Food Code Guidelines:



Not all the products you receive will be ready for distribution. Many products will require a closer look to see if they are usable. Each product will be evaluated differently. Never assume that the product has already been inspected and is safe for use. It is everyone's responsibility to inspect food for safety.

Evaluating Product Fitness – Cans:

Throw out cans that have:



- Dented or pinched top or bottom rim
- Dents on the side seam or an incorrectly welded seam
- Deep dents that do not allow stacking (except for dry goods such as ground coffee, powdered drink mixes)
- Swollen or bulging end, or an end that gives when pushed (Again, except for dry goods such as ground coffee, etc.)
- Rust or soil that does not wipe off
- Dents around the score lines under a pull-tab; openings
- Leaks
- Dirt under a pull-tab top
- Mold or watermarks
- Evidence of exposure to temperature extremes (such scorch marks or frost)
- Signs of insects, including egg cases, body parts, webs, and droppings
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings, or urine
- Dating past the acceptable safe code extension
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

When in doubt, throw it out!

Evaluating Product Fitness – Boxes & Bags:

Throw out boxes that have:

- Open tops or bottoms without inner bags
- Contaminants inside the boxes
- Torn, leaking or contaminated inner bags
- Inner bags with open seams or holes
- Mold or watermarks
- Signs of insects, including bugs in seams, holes, egg cases, webs, body parts, or droppings
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings, or urine
- Dating past the acceptable safe code extension
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

Throw out bags or sacks with:

- Rips, tears, punctures, or holes
- Mold or watermarks
- Incomplete or incorrectly formed seals or seams
- Signs of insects, including bugs in seams, holes, egg cases, webs, body parts, or droppings
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings, or urine
- Dating past the acceptable safe code extension
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

When in doubt, throw it out!

Evaluating Product Fitness – Bottles, Jars, and Pouches:

Throw out glass or plastic bottles or jars with:

- Loose or broken caps
- Leaking Screw tops
- Broken tamper-evident seals
- Other signs the cap was opened
- Foreign objects inside the container
- Unusual product separation
- Mold inside the container
- Dirt or other particles under the rim
- Signs of insects
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings or urine
- Signs the container was wet
- Cracks or chips
- Home-jarred foods
- Dates past the acceptable safe code extension
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

Throw out pouches with:

- Leaks, open seals, holes, or punctures
- Cuts, cracks, or scratches deep enough to leak
- Mold or signs the package was wet
- Incomplete or incorrectly formed seals
- Folds or wrinkles (caused by one side longer than another
- Foreign objects trapped inside pouch or interrupting the seal or seam
- Bulges on the seams
- Inflation
- Signs of insects or rodents
- Dating past the acceptable safe code extension
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

When in doubt, throw it out!

Evaluating Product Fitness – Meat:

Throw out meats that have:

- A strong odor of spoilage
- Blood pooled on the underside of packaging
- Punctured or torn packaging
- A green tinge to the meat

When in doubt, throw it out!

Meats are generally safe even if they have:

- A darker red or even brown color

  This is due to oxygenation of blood
- "Puffy packaging"

  Due to modified atmosphere packaging, where nitrogen or CO_2 is injected into the interior to prevent oxygenation and maintain the color of the meat
- Ice crystals are a sign that meat has partially thawed and refrozen; generally, meat is still safe to consume

Receiving Product:

Evaluate the source of the product:

- If you have consistently received marginal product from a source, bring this to their attention and explain your focus on food safety.
- If you have any concern that the source has not followed key food safety standards, ask for details about their operational practices.
- Do not accept:
  - Prepared foods from restaurants or caterers
  - Prepared foods from organizations or individuals cooking in unlicensed kitchens.
  - Meat that has <u>not</u> been processed in a USDA-certified facility (e.g., venison from a hunter).
  - Homemade foods.

Evaluate product appropriateness and fitness:

- Product should be appropriate for what you can safely store.
- If you don't have adequate freezer space, don't receive frozen product.
- If you don't have adequate refrigerator space, don't receive refrigerated product.
- If product cannot fit in your pantry area, consider not taking as much.
- Do not accept product that is currently or will soon be unfit for consumption. If such product is received, discard it immediately.

Keep receipts of product received:

- Indicate source, date received; itemize product and quantity.
- Receipts are important to track down product recalls.
- Receipts can be used to thank donors.

Transporting Product:

- Bring product back to your storage location in the shortest time possible
- Keep drive times in unrefrigerated vehicles to 30 minutes or less
- Ensure that the transporting vehicle is clean and well maintained.
- Do not transport food products in the same vehicle used to transport trash, chemicals or other dangerous or unsanitary products.
- As a best practice, during transport refrigerated and frozen products should be wrapped in insulated blankets, thermal wrap, or put in coolers.

Maintaining Inventory – General Rules:

Make sure that the oldest food in storage is used first. This will reduce food waste and keep food safe. Food rotation should be based on either the acceptable code-date extension or the receipt date (i.e., date food is picked up or shipped to your program).

- Follow the **First-expired, First-out (FEFO)** method of rotation.
- Move older product to the front of shelves.
- If you have shelving dedicated to the next distribution, put older product from your stockroom on these shelves.

Go through your entire inventory quarterly (dry and frozen) and throw out any product that is significantly past the acceptable code-date extension. Refer to the Connecticut Foodshare Food Code Guidelines found on our website here.

Go through all your refrigerated inventory WEEKLY and throw out product that is past the acceptable code-date extension.

Do not stockpile large quantities of food for an emergency.

Do not open packages and repackage the food into smaller portions for distribution unless you have a Health Department approved clean room to be sure the process is done safely and correctly.

Checking for recalls:

- Check the USDA and FDA websites REGULARLY for product recalls.
- The USDA reports on meat, dairy, and egg related recalls
- The FDA reports on all other food-related recalls
- Local and national news broadcasts about product recalls should lead you to find out details from the USDA or FDA websites.

    - First review product receipts.
    - Visually inspect your inventory for affected product.

- If you have affected product in inventory, follow disposal and reporting guidelines associated with the recall.

- If you know that affected product has been distributed, communicate recall to pantry recipients:
    - Post signs about the recall at the pantry.
    - Post recall on pantry social media.
    - Contact recipients using the information you have on file.

Distributing Product:

Distribute older product before newer product (First Expired First Out).

Educate recipients about the safety of food past code dates, when to consume food, when time is a factor, and how to store food responsibly.

Display the Connecticut Foodshare ***Food Code Guidelines*** where recipients can see them.

Keep food in refrigerator or freezer **or** use freezer blankets and coolers with ice packs until distribution starts.

- Frozen and refrigerated food cannot be left in the temperature danger zone for more than 4 hours in its entire life.
- To be safe, donated Refrigerated food that has been in the **temperature danger zone (41° F - 135° F) for more than 1 hour should be discarded because you don't know how the food has been handled before you received it.**

Do not distribute partially thawed or unfrozen meat; bacteria grows much faster when product is in an unfrozen state.

Thank you for reviewing this Food Safety Training for food pantries. We hope that you have the information you need to store and distribute food safely. **Please remember to take the test that accompanies this training guide.** If you have any questions, please contact your Network Relations Representative.

All food safety resources and guidance, including sample temperature and pest control logs can be found on our website here.