



Health and Social Services

FOOD SAFETY GUIDELINE FOR FOOD BANKS

Adapted from draft MODEL GUIDELINE for FOOD SAFETY IN FOOD BANKS, July 1992, developed by the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Committee on Food Safety in collaboration with Saskatchewan Health, City of Regina Health Department, Saskatoon Community Health Unit and Saskatchewan Association of Food Banks.

I. PREAMBLE

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 not having sufficient means to acquire it themselves. Hunger in children is of particular importance, for without nutritious food their development and learning potential falls 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 ensure that food distributed to the hungry is safe to consume. Indeed, public health legislation prohibits unsafe food to be offered or sold to the public. Unfortunately, the objective of offering the safest food possible may at times differ from the objective of providing the most food possible. For example, if on one hand food banks are expected to meet the same standards applying to commercial operations¹, then the volumes of food available to distribute could be curtailed. On the other hand, if no standards or guidelines are in place, food banks could be unwittingly distributing food likely to cause illness. Clearly, a balance must be struck. The following guideline is intended to assist food banks in striking this important balance, that is maximizing quantities available for distribution without compromising acceptable safety precautions associated with handling and distribution.

¹ Federal and provincial government departments have legislation, regulations and inspection programs applying to commercial food processing facilities. As well, commercial operations are indirectly regulated by the power of the purchasing consumer who through his or her choice of what and where to buy can influence the quality of food sold and bought. Because the hungry do not have this power, the dynamics of regulating food banks are different from commercial operations.

II. APPLICATION

These guidelines apply to food banks which are defined as being non-profit organizations owning or operating facilities for receiving, holding, packaging, processing, or distributing food to the hungry and where such food is intended to be consumed at a client's residence. These guidelines do not apply to soup kitchens or similar facilities where food is prepared on-site for consumption on-site and where there is no charge for the food.

Some food banks conduct on-site kitchen workshops and training seminars to teach clients how to cook nutritious and inexpensive meals. The department supports these innovative approaches that foster self-reliance. While the guideline does not apply to this aspect of the food bank operation, the appropriate health jurisdiction should be contacted prior to establishing such a program. They will provide advise on the facilities and equipment required, and may be in a position to provide some safe foodhandling training courses.

III. GENERAL PRINCIPLES/ PRACTICES

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

1. Personal Cleanliness

- All employees or volunteer help while working in direct contact with food or while engaged in food processing, repackaging or otherwise handling food products, should maintain a high degree of personal cleanliness and wear clean outer garments.
- They should wash their hands and exposed portions of their arms thoroughly in an adequate hand washing facility before starting work, and as often as may be necessary to remove soil and after smoking, eating, using the toilet or handling raw meat or poultry.

1. Personal Cleanliness cont.

- No person should eat food, drink beverages or use tobacco in any form in areas where food is exposed or in areas used for washing equipment or utensils.
- No employees or voluntary help while infected with a disease in a communicable form that can be transmitted by foods or who is a carrier of organisms that cause such disease or while affected with a boil, an infected wound, or an acute respiratory infection, should work in the food bank in any capacity in which there is likelihood of such a person contaminating food or food contact surfaces with pathogenic organisms or transmitting disease to other persons.

2. Contamination Protection

- Food while being stored or re-processed at the food bank or during transportation, should be protected from physical, chemical, or microbiological contamination.
- All perishable foods, as well as those susceptible to microbial contamination, should be kept at such temperature as will protect against spoilage. All potentially hazardous foods should be maintained at a safe temperature - less than 4°C (40°F) or greater than 60°C (140°F) (see category 3 for examples of potentially hazardous foods).
- Poisonous and toxic materials should be identified and handled under such conditions as will not contaminate food or constitute a hazard to employees or volunteer help.

3. Salvageable Food

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

4. Equipment and Utensils

- Equipment and utensils contacting food and other food contact surfaces used in the food bank should be made of non-toxic, non-corrosive materials and should be cleanable.
- Equipment should be installed and maintained to facilitate cleaning and kept in good repair.

- Utensils and food contact surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned and where necessary sanitized prior to use.
- All other surfaces or equipment should be cleaned at such intervals as necessary.
- Clean and sanitized equipment and utensils should be handled in a manner that protects them from contamination.
- All single service articles should be used only once.

5. Sanitary Facilities and Controls

- The water supply should comprise hot and cold water, be adequate, be of a safe sanitary quality and from a source constructed and operated in accordance with specifications determined or approved by the appropriate regulatory agency.
- All sewage including liquid waste shall be disposed of through the plumbing system and discharged into a public sewage system or in the absence thereof in a manner approved by Environmental Health Services.
- Toilet facilities including rooms and fixtures should be kept in clean condition and in good repair at all times.
- Food banks should be provided with adequate conveniently located handwashing facilities which are equipped with soap and single service toweling or other effective hand drying devices. Such facilities should be kept clean and in good repair.

6. Garbage and Refuse

- All refuse should be kept in leakproof, non-absorbent containers which should be kept covered with tight fitting lids when stored or not in continuous use.
- Adequate cleaning facilities should be provided and each container room or area should be thoroughly cleaned after the emptying or removal of refuse.
- All refuse should be disposed of with sufficient frequency in a manner to prevent contamination of the salvaged food product and surrounding processing areas.

7. Insect, Rodent and Animal Control

- Effective measures should be taken to protect against the entrance, breeding and the presence of rodents, insects and vermin into the food bank.
- Dogs, cats and other pets should not be allowed in the food bank.

8. Construction/Maintenance of Facilities

- Floors, walls and ceilings should be kept in good repair.
- There should be adequate lighting in hand washing areas, toilet rooms and in areas where food or food ingredients are examined, sorted or stored and utensils are cleaned.
- Consideration should be given to shielding lights in order to protect against broken glass falling onto unpackaged food.
- Food banks should be sufficiently ventilated in order to prevent condensation and dripping onto food or food preparation surfaces.
- Food should not be stored under plumbing pipes or other pipes that could leak its contents onto food or food preparation surfaces.

9. Locker Area

- Employees or volunteer help should be provided with adequate storage facilities for clothing and personal belongings.

10. Vehicles

- Vehicles used to transport food shall be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition to protect from contamination.

11. Employee / Volunteer Training

- To minimize the risk of distributing unsafe foods, it is very important that employees and volunteer help, especially those involved in the critical aspects of the food bank operation (i.e. making decisions as to which cans of food are worth distributing; handling potentially hazardous foods; involved in re-packaging of foods) are properly trained (e.g. *FOODSAFE*).

- People having experience in this area (e.g. reliable and knowledgeable workers who have had much experience within the food bank itself preferably *FOODSAFE* trained; Environmental Health Officers; and certified *FOODSAFE* Instructors) should be sought for training purposes.
- Brochures are available as well (e.g. on discarding cans with damaged seams or pin holes), as well as, *The SANITATION CODE for Canada's Foodservice Industry*.
- The manager, employee or key volunteers who are there on a regular basis could be trained initially and in turn could pass on information and supervise other volunteers in critical areas.

12. Public and Client Information

- It is important that food banks educate the public about the preferred types of foods that should be donated (pre-packaged foods, commercially canned goods, fresh produce, meat and other foods from approved commercial sources, etc.).
- It is also important that the appropriate food safety information be readily available for clients, particularly if some of the foods in their hampers are a higher risk (e.g. potentially hazardous food, foods from unknown sources).

IV. FOOD-TYPE CATEGORIES

Decisions made by the food bank manager or operator to accept donated food and minimize the risk of distributing an unsafe food is dependent on the number of factors. The following four categories have been established to assist food bank operators in determining the relative risks associated with each type of food handled and provide guidance on which precautions should be taken.

Category 1 food is viewed as having the lowest risk. Each of the remaining categories have progressively higher relative risks associated with them.

Category 1

This category includes non-potentially hazardous foods (e.g. prepackaged foods, canned products and dry goods such as flour, sugar, pasta) in unopened packages from commercial food processors or retail stores and includes pre-packaged breads and pastries (without cream filling).

Precautions

- Of particular importance in this category is sorting and selection of cans that may not be safe for consumption. Training (see point number 12 under General Principles) is important.
- Commercial processors of canned products do have 1-800 numbers which can be contacted for advice on best before dates that have expired. This is very important for baby food products.
Gerber - 1-800-443-7237
Heinz - 1-800-268-6641
- If safety of cans is in question, either discard or seek expert advice from a Food Inspector, Canadian Health Inspection Agency (CFIA) at 1-250-470-4884 or from your local Environmental Health Officer.

Category 2

Category 2 food includes low-risk foods such as raw fruit and vegetables.

Precautions

- It is important that adequate refrigeration facilities are available for these 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.
- It is important that food such as sliced cantaloupe be refrigerated.

Category 3

This category includes potentially hazardous foods (e.g. dairy products, egg and egg products, meat and meat products) from a commercial processor or retailer or a licensed restaurant (i.e. not home processed foods) and may involve minor processing or re-packaging.

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 and distributed in their original unopened containers.
- Meat and meat products will be held and distributed in their original unopened packages. However, if large pieces of meat have been donated and further processing such as cutting takes place, then appropriate equipment (e.g. stainless steel equipment, large sinks for washing and sanitizing, hand wash basins) and work areas are important. Processing should take place in a separate area of the food bank in order to prevent cross contamination of finished, ready-to-eat food products with raw meat. As well, a professional butcher should be sought to provide the cutting service.
- Poultry and poultry products - if large birds are donated and cutting is necessary then precaution should be taken as with handling and processing of meat and meat products mentioned above. Particular attention must be given to handling the poultry because of Salmonella concerns.
- Packaging material used for the finished products should be made of a material that will not contaminate the food product. New packaging should be used for foods that could be eaten without washing (e.g. fruit, vegetables (salad), bread products).

Category 3 cont.

- Training of personnel responsible for further processing (e.g. cutting of meat and poultry) or the re-packaging of hard cheeses (mouldy part removed and re-packaged) is important. Arrangements should be made with health jurisdictions or other agencies to provide safe food handling courses, such as *FOODSAFE*.
- Eggs and egg products should be refrigerated. Visibly cracked eggs should be discarded unless they are used in foods which will be heated to an internal temperature of 74°C (165°F).

Category 4

This category includes food which has been processed in the home environment or foods from any source which has been partially consumed. These foods are viewed as being at highest risk because it is not known to what extent partially consumed food has been contaminated or in the case of home processed foods, under what conditions the food was processed and stored. A food bank manager making the decision to handle and distribute this type of food must be made aware that the food carries with it a higher risk. Depending on the extent of the hunger needs within a community, a food bank may be compelled to draw from this source of food in order to avert problems with serious malnutrition. If the decision is made to handle these types of foods, then the following precautions should be taken:

Precautions

- Home canned preserves (jams, jellies and other high sugar content type foods) may be accepted as donation and distributed as long as the product is labeled, unopened (properly sealed) and contained in a proper “can”.
- The following foods are not to be accepted for distribution: unpasteurized dairy products, home canned vegetables or home canned meat products.
- Meat and poultry may be donated if freshly killed (then frozen soon after if applicable), properly dress, and if there was no temperature abuse during storage or transportation. If the food bank chooses to further process (e.g. cut) the meat donated, then facilities, equipment and personnel

should meet the appropriate guidelines respecting Category 3 foods.

- In some cases, freezers full of food are donated to food banks (e.g. family members of a deceased person may donate the food belonging to the estate). Extreme caution must be exercised in these circumstances. If the client is capable of understanding that the food is from an unknown source and is willing to take special precautions at home (e.g. thorough cooking), then the manager may decide to give it to the client. If products are not identifiable then these foods should not be distributed. Again, in no case should home canned vegetables and home canned meat be distributed to clients.
- Partially consumed food regardless of whether they are from the commercial processor, food retailer or from the home may pose a serious risk. Good judgment is required in deciding whether the food should be distributed. Large bags or containers of dry goods (flour, sugar, salt, dry cereal, etc.) may be re-packaged if the product is viewed as being acceptable. Re-packaging is a critical aspect of the food bank operation and, therefore, should be done in proper facilities and by people who have received some basic training in sanitation and food safety. Other foods partially consumed, for example, half jars of mustard, ketchup, jams, which are not potentially hazardous may be directed to soup kitchens. The food bank should advise the soup kitchen as to the source of these materials and any other relevant information that would help a soup kitchen operator make a decision as to whether it can be used.

As mentioned previously, this guideline does not apply to soup kitchens. Food banks are encouraged to work with the Environmental Health Officer to determine what foods are acceptable for use in these kitchens. (The Yukon *Public Health and Safety Act* and its regulations apply to soup kitchens.)

SPECIAL CATEGORY FOODS

Innovative programs may arise allowing additional volumes of food to be contributed to food banks. Special guidelines, in addition to these guidelines may have to be developed by the appropriate jurisdiction to address these new programs.

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