

## Food Complaints

**As part of Huntingdonshire District Council's role in protecting public health, the Food Safety Team investigates food complaints and customer complaints concerning food safety issues relating to food premises.**

Discovering a foreign object in an item of food can be an unpleasant experience. Food that is purchased from restaurants, take-aways, supermarkets and local shops must be fit to eat and be free from contamination. If you have reason to believe that an item of food is contaminated in some way, you should contact an officer in the Food Safety team for advice.

The following are examples of complaints that will be investigated:

- Food contaminated with foreign objects eg metal, glass or plastic
- Food which is mouldy
- Food which is unfit &/or past the 'Use by' date
- Food which you believe may have caused illness to the consumer

It is important to store the affected food in a safe and secure place until it is handed to a Food Safety Officer. The food, foreign object and original packaging should be placed in a clean, sealed bag. Chilled or frozen products should be stored in either the fridge or freezer in order to prevent further deterioration. Care should be taken to not remove or dislodge foreign objects or to contaminate other food products in your kitchen. You will be asked to provide details of the date and time of purchase (keep any receipts that you may have), description of the complaint and any ill effects suffered if the food has been consumed. You may be asked to provide a witness statement in order to assist the officer with the investigation. The officer will then carry out a thorough investigation which may involve liaising with the retailer, manufacturer and other Local Authority Environmental Health Departments. If the product has been imported into the UK then liaison with overseas agencies may be involved. You will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation and the eventual outcome.

We **will not** attempt to gain compensation or financial redress on your behalf, but you are free to take civil action independently against the retailer or producer of the food if you wish.

In addition to investigating complaints about specific food items, the Food Safety Team will also follow up complaints about food premises (hotels, restaurants, take-aways, supermarkets, mobile food vendors etc). Such complaints may include:

- Poor food handling practices observed
- Poor cleaning standards
- Sightings of pests
- Absence of a hot or cold water supply

**We will not investigate complaints regarding poor food quality or unsatisfactory customer service.**

Some food complaints are dealt with by Cambridgeshire Council Council's Trading Standards Department who can be contacted at:

Supporting Business & Communities  
Cambridgeshire County Council  
P O Box 450  
Cambridge City  
CB23 6ZR  
Tel: 03454 0405056  
[info@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:info@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

Such complaints include foods contaminated with taints or chemicals, and issues with labelling.

Some food complaints do not pose a risk to public safety, but nevertheless should not have occurred. In practice it is best to return the affected item to the manufacturer or the retailer and request a refund. The following is a list of the most common complaints which should be referred to the retailer:

### **Bakery Goods:**

**Bakery char:** Occasionally bread and cakes may contain pieces of overcooked dough which has flaked off baking sheets and tins. Char may be dark in colour and usually irregularly shaped.

**Carbonised grease:** Non-toxic vegetable oil is used to lubricate machinery found in bakeries. Occasionally 'pellets' of oil which may resemble mouse droppings are found in bakery products.

### **Meat & Poultry:**

**Skin, bone:** Products made from meat or poultry may contain small pieces of bone, skin, hair, bristles or parts of blood vessels. Although unsightly, they are part of the original animal and do not pose a health hazard.

### **Fish:**

**Cod worm:** white fish such as cod or haddock may be infested with small, round light brown worms. The worms may not be detected when filleting, but will be killed when cooked and are not harmful to health.

### **Unprepared Fruit & Vegetables:**

**Stones, soil, slugs:** fruit and vegetables may be found to have soil, stones or small slugs adhering to them. This is quite normal as they originate from the soil. Ensure that fruit and vegetables are washed, peeled or scraped before use.

**Greenfly:** leafy vegetables and salad leaves may contain greenfly, especially if organic, as no pesticides are used during production. Ensure that salad items are washed before use.

### **Tinned goods:**

**Fruit flies:** are naturally associated with fruit and may occasionally be found in tinned fruit products. The canning process renders them harmless.

**Insects:** small grubs and insects may be found in canned vegetables such as sweet corn or tomatoes. Ideally they should not be present but the grubs live inside vegetables and are difficult to detect prior to processing. The canning process renders them harmless.

**Struvite:** some naturally occurring elements in fish, particularly salmon, may develop into hard crystals during the canning process. The crystals are frequently mistaken for glass. Struvite crystals will dissolve or reduce in size if gently heated in vinegar for approximately 20 minutes. If there is no reduction in size it is possible that the object is glass; in which case refer the product to the Food Safety Team for investigation.

### **Dried goods:**

**Insects:** Dried products such as flour, sugar and pulses may contain very small light grey insects called psocids or book lice. Psocids are commonly found in dark, warm, humid conditions such as kitchen cupboards and do not carry disease.

### **Chocolate and Confectionery:**

**Bloom:** chocolate may develop a light-coloured 'bloom' commonly mistaken for mould, if it has been stored at too high a temperature. The bloom is due to fat separation and is not harmful to health.

**Sugar crystals:** large sugar crystals which can be mistaken for glass, may form in confectionery. The crystals will dissolve in warm water. If they do not, they may be glass and should be referred to the Food Safety Team for investigation.

Further information can be obtained from the Food Safety Team, Community Services, Huntingdonshire District Council, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN  
Tel 01480 388388 food@huntingdonshire.gov.uk [www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk](http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk)