

Food Safety - Frequently Asked Questions

Can the Council close down food businesses which don't comply with hygiene standards?

Yes, but conditions in the business have to be very poor, e.g. very dirty premises or a serious pest infestation, and we have to prove in Court that there is a real risk to health from the premises. In most cases we prefer to help businesses comply with the regulations and trade successfully.

Can I run a food business from my home?

You may need to obtain planning permission and you may need to register as a food business. Your home must also comply with the same food safety standards as any food premises and be inspected by Food Safety Officers. A free booklet on catering from home safely is available from the Food Safety section.

How can I make a complaint about an item of food I have bought?

Contact the food safety team - they deal with many cases of this kind, including foreign bodies in food, mouldy food and food which is not what it claims to be on the label. You will be asked to bring the food to our offices and provide details to our officer. If the food is perishable please refrigerate or freeze it if you can't get it to us quickly

How does the Council keep a check on the food sold in the East Lindsey?

Officers from the Food Safety team carry out routine inspections of all food premises and sampling of food on a programmed basis from food businesses in the District.

How often do food businesses have to be inspected by Environmental Health officers?

It depends on the risk associated with the particular business, which in turn depends on the kind of business (e.g. a restaurant poses a higher potential risk than a shop selling only packaged food) and the condition of the business itself as assessed by the inspector at every visit.

Inspection intervals range from every six months (highest risk) to every five years (lowest risk).

I have become ill after eating at a local restaurant - what should I do?

Contact your GP as soon as possible. He or she will assess your condition and probably ask you for a stool sample - this can establish what kind of food poisoning you may have, and with this information Environmental Health officers may be able to link your illness to what you have eaten.

Remember however that most cases of food poisoning originate in the home! People often assume that the last meal they ate was the cause of their food poisoning symptoms. In fact the most common form of food poisoning can result from food eaten up to 11 days prior to symptoms becoming apparent. This obviously makes it difficult for officers to identify the cause of the illness unless a number of people (who haven't eaten any other meals together) have similar symptoms after eating food from the same source.

I want to start a Food Business in East Lindsey - what do I have to do?

Contact us and tell us the kind of business you wish to start and we will send you an information pack advising you what you need to do and who you need to talk to in order to ensure you comply with the relevant regulations

Is it illegal for a shop to have out-of-date food on display?

Not necessarily - what matters is the condition of the food when it is sold. Some date marking is only for guidance ('Best Before') but food which is past its 'Use By' date should not be eaten. The best advice is 'if food is out of date, don't buy it' and if a shop consistently displays out-of-date food, shop elsewhere!.

The corner shop I use is not very clean or tidy - can the Council send someone round to inspect it?

Inspections are programmed according to risk. In order to direct resources where they are most needed, visits outside the inspections programme will usually only be made if there is a risk to health. If you perceive that the situation warrants investigation then complaints made to the food team will be looked into.

What can Environmental Health Officers do about a case of food poisoning?

In single cases of food poisoning, officers can offer advice about the possible sources of the illness and ways it can be avoided.

Where there are a number of cases of the illness, officers will investigate to determine if there is a common link to water, food or another source and seek to reduce the risk to other members of the public.

What do Use-by and Best before dates mean?

"Best before" are used on food with a long shelf life (for example, biscuits) and are for guidance only. A "Use-by" date is used on foods with a short shelf life (for example, packaged sandwiches). It is illegal to sell food after its "Use-by" date.

What should I do if I find insects in my food?

Insects can get into food at the production stage, before it is packaged, in the retailer's shop or in your own home. Bring the food into our office and provide details to our officers. An officer will try to determine the source of the insects and provide advice on the best course of action.

What temperature should you store food at?

Foods that need to be kept hot should be kept at 63C or above. (cooking or reheating should achieve at least 75C)

Foods that need to be kept cold should be kept at 8C or below (preferably between 1C and 5C).

Foods that need to be kept frozen should be kept below -18C