

# Food safety and hygiene guidance for food banks and charities

## Registering as a food business

Guidance on whether you need to register as a food business

Anyone working or volunteering with a food bank or food aid charity should be aware of the information in this guide.

### Registering as a food business

You may need to [register as a food business](#) if you, or your operation, provide food to the community on a **regular and organised** basis, even if it's free, 28 days before you start providing food.

We have specific advice on [how to register as a food business](#).

Before regularly providing food to the community, contact your [local authority food safety team](#) to discuss registration requirements.

As a food business operator, you need to follow the relevant food safety and hygiene requirements, outlined in this guidance. Registering as a food business means your operation will receive [inspections](#) from authorised officers and be given a food hygiene rating, if applicable.

If you only **occasionally** provide food to the community, you may not need to register as a food business. However, the food you provide should still be safe to eat and we recommend you follow the food safety and hygiene best-practices listed in this guide.

As a food business operator, your [local food safety team](#) can provide further support and advice on matters in this guidance.

We also have food safety and hygiene guidance for [hosting or providing food at a community or charity event](#).

## Setting up a food bank, food aid charity or provider

Guidance for starting a charity food provider.

If your operation is [classified as a food business](#), it needs to follow the same [principles that apply to other food businesses](#).

This includes following rules on your:

- [premises](#)
- food preparation areas

- equipment
- food waste
- allergen controls

If you operate in a shared building or location, you need to put in place the same measures and precautions as if it were a single-occupancy premises.

## Managing food hygiene

Food hygiene requirements for your charity food provider.

[Good food hygiene](#) makes sure the food you serve is safe to eat. Ensure your operation is familiar with and follows the four main areas:

- [cleaning](#)
- [cooking](#)
- [chilling](#) and
- [avoiding cross-contamination](#)

Following guidance on [personal hygiene](#), such as handwashing, will also help ensure high food safety standards.

## Managing food safety for charity food providers

Food safety management for a charity food provider, classed as a food business

All food businesses must have [food safety management](#) procedures in place, which should be based on the principles of [Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point \(HACCP\)](#).

Our [safer food, better business \(SFBB\)](#) packs are based on HACCP principles and help smaller operations to comply with the law.

See our guide on [preparing for your first food hygiene inspection](#) to make sure you are ready for your food safety inspection.

If you are not [classed as a food business](#), you still have a duty to provide safe food. Using the guidance on this page will help.

### Food safety of donations

When food has been delivered, check that foods which require chilling or freezing are cold enough and the packaging is not damaged. If you don't think the food delivered has been handled safely or is poor quality, don't use it.

Tinned food should be safe to eat if the tin is dented, providing the dent is shallow and there are no other obvious signs of damage. However, if the dent is deep, the tin may have a hidden split, hole or break in the seal. This could result in a tin that is no longer a reliable container. In this case, the food inside should not be distributed or eaten. If the dent has caused the can to rust, the food inside should not be distributed or consumed either.

Food stored in glass jars sometimes contain a safety button on the top of the metal lid. This can be pressed down to indicate the integrity of the product seal. Food stored in glass jars either has air removed from the product or contains a modified atmosphere to maintain the safety of the food. If the button is not pressed down, this shows the jar has been opened. Always ensure the seal on glass jars is intact and has not been opened.

Do not distribute food from a visibly bulging can or a food jar that has been tampered with (for example, the safety button on the top of the lid can be pressed down). This could indicate the presence and growth of bacteria, making the food unsafe to eat.

## Providing allergen information

It is important to manage allergens effectively to ensure food is safe for customers with food allergies, intolerances or coeliac disease. If you are registered as a food business, you must follow the [allergen rules set out for food businesses](#), including:

- providing accurate allergen information for [different types of food](#), such as prepacked and non-prepacked (loose) foods
- handle and manage food allergens effectively in any preparation or kitchen, such as avoiding [cross contamination](#)

Managers can use and share sections of our [allergen checklist](#) with staff to ensure food allergy best-practice.

Staff and volunteers can complete our free [food allergy training](#).

Download our [allergy poster](#) to display on your site. It is also available in:

- [Welsh](#)
- [Bengali \(?????\)](#)
- [Cantonese \(??\)](#)
- [Punjabi \(???????\)](#)
- [Urdu \(?????\)](#)

## Use-by and best before dates

**Best before dates relate to quality, not food safety.**

You can supply food after the best before date, but the food may not meet the quality expected by the consumer.

[Waste and Resources Action Programme \(WRAP\) has visual check guidelines](#) for supplying food past the best before date.

**Use-by dates keep consumers safe.**

A use-by date is required on food that spoils or goes off quickly that will be a danger to health if consumed after the given date. It is an offence to supply food after the use-by date.

If the date has already expired, [throw it away](#).

A use-by or best before date is required on most **'prepacked' food**. This will usually be done by the producer or manufacturer. Prepacked food is any food put into packaging **before** being sold or given away.

Some prepacked foods do not require date labelling, such as unprepared, whole fresh fruit and vegetables. Read the [full list of exemptions](#).

If you receive 'non-prepacked' (loose) foods or food that was 'pre-packed for direct sale', such as sandwiches from a sandwich shop, they may become classified as 'prepacked' food once donated to you. This is because they are no longer in the place they were made. You may be required to add date labelling before distributing in this instance.

Read about [pre-packed, prepacked for direct sale and non-prepacked \(loose\) foods](#).

Find more information about [use-by and best before dates](#).

## Labelling non-prepacked food donations

[Non-prepacked \(loose\) foods](#), such as sandwiches made and sold directly to customers in a sandwich shop, do not need use-by or best-before dates.

However, if non-prepacked food is donated to a food bank or charity and then put into packaging, it may become "[prepacked food](#)" because it is no longer being sold (or given away) at the place it was made and is placed in packaging.

In this case, it is required to display a use-by or best-before date, and other [mandatory information](#).

Use WRAP's [guidance on date labelling](#) to help comply with these regulations.

We are aware meeting labelling requirements for donated non-prepacked foods may be challenging. More in-depth advice will be provided soon.

Some foods don't require a use-by or best before date, such as unprepared, whole fresh fruit and vegetables. DEFRA and the FSA provide a list of [exemptions](#).

Talk to your [local authority food safety team](#) if you need advice and are not clear about which labelling requirements apply to food you receive and supply.

## Foods requiring special attention

Foods that pose a food safety risk to the consumer and/or do not meet legal labelling requirements should not be distributed.

Some foods require special attention, such as eggs.

In order to maintain eggs in optimum condition, guidance set out by [the British Lion](#) (an egg safety scheme) recommends eggs are:

- stored at an even temperature and below 20° in their outer boxes or packs
- stored in a dry place away from strong smelling foods and possible contaminants
- not stored or displayed near to heat sources such as fridge motors and fan heaters or in direct sunlight
- kept away from pre-cooked or raw foods
- handled in a way to minimise damage

Once the eggs have reached the consumer, the eggs should be stored in a cool, dry place. Ideally, in the fridge.

Other foods that require extra care include:

- raw milk
- raw shellfish
- soft cheeses
- pâté
- foods containing raw egg
- cooked sliced meats

If you provide any of these foods, consult the "[foods which need extra care](#)" section from the [Safer Food Better Business \(SFBB\) pack](#).

## Traceability

If you are [classified as a food business](#), you need to put systems in place to ensure traceability of the food donated and distributed.

If a product is recalled by a seller due to its safety, you need to know if you redistributed that product.

You must keep an up-to-date record of your suppliers. Records should include:

- name and address
- type and quantity of food
- date of transaction and delivery

Read more about managing [traceability](#) and [recalls](#).

[Sign up to receive allergy alerts and recalls](#).

## Storing and freezing food safely

Guidance on storing food to keep it safe to eat.

### Storing food

Avoid cross-contamination by storing individual foods in, clean, sealed containers. This stops objects, bacteria and chemicals getting in the food.

Follow packet instructions on how to store a food, such as in a fridge or freezer.

Ensure your fridges and freezers are set to the recommended temperatures. Fridges and chilled display equipment should be set at 8°C or below as a legal requirement. A freezer should be -18°C.

### Freezing food to extend life

You can extend the life of ambient or chilled foods by freezing them, if the food is suitable for freezing.

Food must be frozen before midnight on the use-by date and re-labelled correctly, following our guidance on [bulk freezing of ambient and chilled foods](#).

WRAP's [labelling guidance for food redistribution](#) may also help.

Frozen food should be [defrosted](#) thoroughly in the fridge. The time this takes depends on the food itself. Once food is defrosted, it should be used within 24 hours.

Follow further guidance on [chilling food correctly](#) and [transporting frozen food safely](#), if required.

## Transporting food safely

Guidance for if you transport food to the consumer.

Food must be delivered to consumers safe and fit to eat. You must ensure:

- food is transported in packaging or containers that prevent contamination
- chilled and frozen foods are delivered to consumers in a way that ensures that they do not become unsafe or unfit to eat (for example, by using cool bags and boxes, or refrigerated vans)
- raw and ready-to-eat foods are kept separately

Follow our [food safety for food delivery](#) guidance for more information.

## Disposing of food

Information on how to dispose of food properly.

You must dispose of food waste and food no longer intended or safe for human consumption properly.

If food waste or former foodstuffs are of animal origin or contain products of animal origin, you must dispose of them in a way that doesn't pose a risk to human or animal health.

The government has [guidance on how to properly dispose of food waste](#).

## Training for charity food providers

Training available for charity food providers.

Food business operators (owner or manager) must have had suitable training in food safety and hygiene. Food handlers don't have to hold a food hygiene certificate to prepare or sell food. However, they must receive appropriate supervision and training in food hygiene, in-line with the area they work in, which can be learned by:

- Training on-the-job
- Self-study
- Prior experience

We offer free online training for individuals and businesses to ensure food safety best practice, including:

- [allergen training](#)
- [root cause analysis training](#)

Ask your [local authority](#) about food hygiene courses.

You may be able to seek funding or grants for safety training through [government grants](#), your local authority, or fund-raising.

## Useful downloads and links for food banks and charities

Find and download useful documents for ensuring food safety.

Download:

- our [safer food, better business pack](#) for retailers, containing relevant guidance and posters needed for food banks and other charity food providers in England and Wales
- our [safety management guides](#) for businesses in Northern Ireland
- our guide on [preparing for your first food hygiene inspection](#)
- Waste and Resources Action Programme's (WRAP) guidance for [food redistribution labelling and redistribution checklist](#)
- use [WRAP's food date labelling and storage advice](#)

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