Food Service Premises Operator Information Guide

Niagara Region

Food Service Premises Operator Information Guide

Niagara Region

niagararegion.ca/health

Food Service Premises Operator Information Guide

Introduction

In today's world, people have many options for obtaining food, including grocery stores, convenience stores, restaurants, food trucks, farmers' markets, special events and food banks. Regardless of its source, people have the right to expect that the food they choose to eat has been prepared in a safe and sanitary manner, and therefore should not cause foodborne illness.

The intent of this food safety guide is to provide food premise owners and operators with enhanced food safety knowledge to assist in maintaining safe and sanitary establishments. This guide will highlight food safety legislation, types of public health inspections, and the Niagara Region Public Health & Emergency Services food safety disclosure website. New information may be added to the appendices of this guide as needed. It is recommended that owners, operators, food handlers, and other staff read this guide thoroughly; however, it is ultimately the responsibility of food premise owners and operators to ensure that their food is safe to eat.

For additional information:
Please contact your area public health inspector or call
Niagara Region Public Health & Emergency Services
905-688-8248 ext. 7590.

Food Service Premises Operator Information Guide

Niagara Region

niagararegion.ca/health

Common Food Safety Terms

Cross Contamination: The transfer of pathogens, chemicals, or unwanted items onto food that may make it unsafe to eat.

Danger Zone: The optimal growth temperature for most pathogens. It is between 4 C/40 F (cold holding temperature) and 60 C/140 F (hot holding temperature).

Food: Food or drink for human consumption, and includes an ingredient of food or drink for human consumption.

Food Contact Surface: The surface of counters, equipment, and utensils with which food may normally come into contact.

Food Handler: Any person who is employed in a food premise and handles or comes in contact with any utensil or with food during its preparation, processing, packaging, service, storage, or transportation.

Food Premise: A premises where food or milk is manufactured, processed, prepared, stored, handled, displayed, distributed, transported, sold, or offered for sale, but does not include a room actually used as a dwelling in a private residence.

Food Service Premise: Any food premise where meals or meal

portions are prepared for immediate consumption, or sold or served in a form that will permit immediate consumption on the premise or elsewhere.

Foodborne Illness: Occurs as a result of eating or drinking contaminated food or water (also referred to as food poisoning).

Health Hazard: A condition of a premises; a substance, thing, plant, or animal other than a person; or a solid, liquid, gas, or combination of any of them, that has or is likely to have an adverse effect on the health of any person.

Incubation Period: The period between exposure to a pathogen and the appearance of the first symptoms.

Common Food Safety Terms

Operator: In relation to a food premise, means a person who has responsibility for and control over an activity carried on at the food premise.

Pathogens: Harmful microorganisms that can cause illness or disease in humans.

Potentially Hazardous Food: Means a food in a form or state that is capable of supporting the growth of infectious or toxigenic microorganisms, and which requires time and temperature control to limit such growth.

Sanitizing: Treatment designed to reduce the level of microoganisms to a level that will not compromise the safety of food products.

Foodborne Illness

A foodborne illness (food poisoning) occurs as a result of eating or drinking contaminated food or water.

There are several different types of foodborne contamination:

- **Microbiological (microorganism) contamination** includes bacteria, viruses, parasites, and moulds
- **Chemical contamination** includes contamination by pest control chemicals, cleaning chemicals such as degreasers, or chemicals in the foods themselves (e.g., tetrodotoxin in pufferfish, poisonous mushrooms)
- **Physical contamination** includes contamination by broken equipment and other items (e.g., broken glass, metal filings, paint chips, bandages, fingernails, staples, etc.)
- **Allergens** are food proteins that are foreign to some people's immune systems; most common allergens in Canada include peanuts and tree nuts, dairy, shellfish, eggs, wheat gluten, seeds, and sulphites

Most foodborne illnesses will have some combination of the following symptoms:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Abdominal cramps, bloating and gas, and diarrhea (bloody and/or watery)
- Fever and/or chills
- Headache and/or body aches

Some serious foodborne illness complications are:

- Anemia
- Ulcers
- Muscle damage
- Paralysis
- Miscarriage/stillbirth
- Coma
- Death

Many people believe that foodborne illness is caused by their last meal or last food item consumed; however, foodborne illness symptoms may not occur until days or even weeks after the contaminated food is eaten. The timeframe from eating contaminated food until symptoms appear is known as the incubation period for the foodborne illness. The incubation period is influenced by:

- The type of microorganism/ contamination causing the illness
- The amount of microorganism/ contamination consumed
- The immune capacity of the victim (the most vulnerable people are infants, the elderly, pregnant women, and those who are immunocompromised)

Reporting Foodborne Illness:
If a customer advises you that they believe they have suffered a foodborne illness, please recommend that they contact Niagara Region Public Health & Emergency Services at 905-688-3762. A public health inspector will follow up and investigate the potential cause of the foodborne illness.

Food Service Premises Operator Information Guide

Niagara Region

niagararegion.ca/health

Public Health Legislation in Ontario

All Ontario food premises must operate in accordance with the requirements of Ontario Regulation – Food Premises, which is under the authority of the Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA). Public health inspectors are mandated to inspect all food premises in order to ensure compliance with the legislation and to ensure that they are free of health hazards. Public health inspectors will use their observations to provide food safety information to owners, operators, and staff.

Items observed during an inspection are documented in an inspection report, which is discussed with an owner, operator, or staff member. Owners and operators are responsible for correcting outstanding items and complying with the legislation at all times. Some specific sections of the HPPA to note include:

16 (1) Every person who operates a food premises shall maintain and operate the food premise in accordance with the regulations

16 (2) Every person who intends to commence to operate a food premise shall give notice of the person's intention to the medical officer of health of the health unit in which the food premise will be located

16 (3) Every person employed on or in a food premise shall comply with the standards and requirements prescribed by the regulations for such persons

Copies of the Ontario Regulation 493/17 - Food Premises and the Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act are available online. Any questions regarding these documents can be discussed with your area public health inspector.

Food Service Premises Operator Information Guide

Niagara Region

niagararegion.ca/health

Risk Assessment and Inspection Frequency

The HPPA grants public health inspectors right of entry into public premises for the purpose of conducting inspections and preventing and/or eliminating health hazards. Each year, public health inspectors conduct a risk assessment of all food premises in their health unit in order to determine their risk level and inspection frequency.

Factors that influence risk level include the type of food being prepared and the complexity of food handling processes, the vulnerability (immune capacity) of the premises' primary patrons, and the premises' inspection history. Further information about each of the various risk levels are presented in the following table:

Risk Level	Risk Assessment Criteria	Minimum Inspection Frequency
High	Any food establishment that prepares potentionally hazardous foods (e.g., meat, poultry, fish, rice, dairy products, or other high-protein foods) and meets at least one of the following criteria: • Uses processes that involve extensive food handling and many preparation steps (e.g., defrosting, cooking, cooling, hot holding, reheating) • Daily preparation of large volumes of potentially hazardous foods • Serves food to a high-risk population based on age or medical condition • Implicated or confirmed as a source of foodborne illness/outbreak	**Three** inspections per year
Moderate	Any food establishment that meets one or more of the following criteria: • Prepares potentially hazardous foods without meeting the criteria outlined above under high-risk (e.g., quick serve restaurants, submarine, and pizza establishments) • Prepares non-hazardous foods with extensive handling and/or high volume	**Two** inspections per year

Risk Level	Risk Assessment Criteria	Minimum Inspection Frequency
Low	Any food establishment that does not prepare potentially hazardous foods and meets one or more of the following criteria: • Serves prepackaged potentially hazardous foods • Prepares and/or serves non-hazardous foods without meeting the criteria above under moderate risk • Acts as a food storage facility for only non-hazardous foods • Public health concerns relate primarily to sanitation and maintenance	**One** inspection per year

Additional inspections may be performed in order to follow-up on issues of non-compliance, to investigate complaints, to investigate reports of suspect and/or confirmed foodborne illness, to enforce the Healthy Menu Choices Act (menu labelling), and to assist with food recalls issued by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (federal government).

Routine inspections are unannounced. This gives inspectors a true understanding of the day-to-day operations and maintenance of the premises and the food handling practices of food handlers. Inspectors may attend premises during busy periods to better assess food handling practices during the busiest times of the day. Inspectors are mindful of the operation of premises, however they need to observe operators during busy periods when food handling practices may be rushed and lead to increased risk of errors that could cause foodborne illness.

Types of Infractions

Violations observed during inspections of food premises are categorized as either critical or non-critical infractions.

Critical Infractions:

Critical infractions have the potential to pose an immediate public health risk and may lead to foodborne illness. Most critical infractions must be corrected at time of inspection.

Some examples of critical infractions include:

- Food handlers not washing their hands prior to handling food or when switching from one task to another
- Potentially hazardous foods not being cooked to the minimum internal temperature required to kill pathogenic bacteria (bacteria that cause foodborne illness)
- Potentially hazardous foods not being stored at appropriate temperatures to prevent growth of harmful bacteria (in other words, foods are being stored in the danger zone)
- Contamination of cooked or ready-to-eat foods (e.g., salads, sandwiches, etc.) by hazardous raw foods
- Contamination of foods by chemicals, physical objects (e.g., broken pieces of equipment), or by a pest infestation

Non-critical Infractions:

Non-critical infractions do not pose an immediate health risk; they may not be directly related to food handling practices and are not likely to lead to foodborne illness.

Some examples of non-critical infractions include:

- Kitchen equipment that is poorly designed/arranged so that it prevents proper cleaning and sanitizing
- Floors, walls, and other non-food contact surfaces requiring cleaning or repair
- Food handlers not having confined hair
- Garbage not being removed from the premise

Food Service Premises Operator Information Guide

Niagara Region

niagararegion.ca/health

Education

Public health inspectors and food premise owners/operators share a common goal – the provision of safe food to the public. During inspections, "teachable moments" often arise after observation of unsafe food handling practices. Public health inspectors will use these errors as opportunities to educate food handlers. When people understand why their behaviours/ methods are unsafe, they are more likely to make the necessary corrections, leading to prevention of foodborne illness.

Food Handler Certification

Food handler certification is another means of education; Ontario Regulation 493/17 and Niagara Region's Food Handler Certification By-Law 78-2010 require that food premises have certified food handlers on-site. Food premises must have at least one owner or operator (manager/ supervisor) that is certified in safe food handling, as well as one certified food handler on-site during hours of operation. Food handler certificates/ cards and proof of identification must be available for viewing by a public health inspector.

In order to become a certified food handler, one must obtain a passing grade of 70 per cent on the Ministry of

Health and Long-Term Care's (MOHLTC) standardized exam. Certification is valid for five years, after which time one will need to rewrite the exam.

Niagara Region Public Health & Emergency Services offer several different options for attaining food handler certification:

- Full course – A nine-hour course, usually taught as three, three-hour sessions. Topics include legislation, understanding foodborne illness, safe food handling, and HACCP
- Short course – A two-hour review-style course, immediately followed by the exam. Self-study is recommended prior to this course
- Exam only – A one-hour exam without any teaching component. Self-study is recommended prior to the exam

A course manual is provided at the full course. Additional printed manuals may be purchased at Niagara Region Public Health & Emergency Services (Thorold and Welland offices), or online at **niagararegion.ca/health**.

In addition to the courses and exams offered by Niagara Region Public Health & Emergency Services, food handler certification may be acquired through programs offered by another public health unit in Ontario or by an agency whose program has received accreditation by the MOHLTC.

More information about food handler certification is available at niagararegion.ca/health.

Food Service Premises Operator Information Guide

Niagara Region

niagararegion.ca/health

Enforcement

Despite efforts to ensure informed practice, some owners and operators may continue to engage in unsafe practices and repeat infractions in their food premises. These circumstances may require public health inspectors to take legal enforcement action.

Public health inspectors are designated as provincial offences officers under the Ontario Provincial Offences Act. Accordingly, they may issue offence notices (tickets) and summonses for contraventions of the Ontario Food Premises Regulation. An offence notice is a set fine for violation of a single regulatory requirement, whereas a summons prompts the setting of a trial date and a justice of the peace decides on an appropriate penalty (which can be thousands of dollars).

In addition to regulatory enforcement, public health inspectors are authorized by the HPPA to issue orders (verbal and written) for the purpose of preventing and/or eliminating health hazards.

These orders may require the owners, operators, or occupiers (staff) of food premises to take certain actions or to refrain from certain actions. In situations where a health hazard(s) cannot be immediately eliminated, a public health inspector may issue an order to close the food premises.

Some common reasons for ordering closure of food premises include:

- Presence of an infestation (rodents or insects)
- Absence of running water
- Absence of mechanical refrigeration when cold-holding potentially hazardous foods
- A power failure
- Occurrence of a sewage backup
- Gross lack of sanitation
- Occurrence of a fire
- Damage that may result in contamination of food
- Occurrence of a community foodborne outbreak

There are significant penalties for contravening a community health protection order. Individuals can be fined up to $5,000 for every day an offence is allowed to continue, and a corporation can be fined up to $25,000 each day.

The HPPA permits public health inspectors to seize and destroy items that are considered to be health hazards. For example, inspectors may discard potentially hazardous foods that have been left out at unsafe temperatures or broken/damaged utensils, such as heavily grooved cutting boards that cannot be properly cleaned and sanitized.

People that attempt to prevent public health inspectors from performing their duties are deemed to be in contravention of the HPPA and can be charged with obstruction. If needed, public health inspectors can obtain assistance from police officers in order to complete their inspections and investigations.

Public Disclosure

The public has a right to know about the environment in which its food is prepared and public health units have a duty to inform.

People can use inspection results to determine whether or not they wish to give food premises their business. As per the MOHLTC's Food Safety Protocol, inspection results must be made available to the general public via the public health unit's website. Disclosure information must be maintained on the website for at least a two-year period.

Research has demonstrated that disclosure systems improve compliance with food safety legislation and enhance food safety standards in food premises. Disclosure information is beneficial to the public as it allows people to make an informed decision about where they would like to dine and/or purchase their food. It is also beneficial to food premise owners. It provides an opportunity to show the public that their premise is operated in a safe and sanitary manner.

In Niagara region, the food safety disclosure website can be found at **niagararegion.ca/inspect**. It displays all infractions observed during an inspection, including items that are corrected at the time of inspection and those that are outstanding and require a follow-up inspection. Additionally, closures, convictions, and orders issued are displayed for public knowledge.

Food Service Premises Operator Information Guide

Niagara Region

niagararegion.ca/health

Common Foodborne Illnesses

Bacillus cereus (bacteria):

Common sources: Rice, pasta, dairy products, meat, and vegetables

Symptoms: Two types of illness - 1) Vomiting type - nausea and vomiting; 2) Diarrheal type - abdominal cramps, diarrhea, sometimes fever, and vomiting; illness may progress into severe pneumonia

Incubation period: 24 to 48 hours (average 12 hours)

Prevention: Keep potentially hazardous foods including rice out of the danger zone; proper cooling of food items; acidify sushi rice with vinegar

Campylobacter spp. (bacteria):

Common sources: Raw or undercooked poultry, beef, pork, and lamb, unpasteurized dairy products, raw vegetables, shellfish, and untreated drinking water

Symptoms: Abdominal cramps, diarrhea (often bloody), and fever; illness may progress into Guillian-Barré syndrome (nervous system autoimmune disorder)

Incubation period: 2 to 5 days; may be as long as 1 month

Prevention: Achieve proper cooking temperature of chicken and other potentially hazardous foods; avoid cross-contamination of food and work surfaces (e.g., avoid using the same plates and utensils for raw and cooked meat during barbecue season)

Common Foodborne Illnesses

Clostridium botulinum (bacteria):

Common sources: Honey, improperly canned foods, foods stored in oil (e.g., garlic, vegetables, spices), baked potatoes wrapped in tin foil, and low-acid juices (e.g., apple juice, prune juice)

Symptoms: Produces a toxin that can cause nausea and vomiting, weakness and dizziness, blurred or double vision, dry mouth, difficulty swallowing, and descending paralysis (starts in the arms and moves downward through the rest of the body; may lead to respiratory failure and death)

Incubation period: 6 to 36 hours; may be as long as 10 days

Prevention: Honey should not be given to children under one year old; store garlic-oil, spice-oil, and food-oil mixtures at temperatures of 4 C/40 F or less; follow proper canning recipes and methods

Clostridium perfringens (bacteria):

Common sources: Foods high in starch, foods high in protein (e.g., beans, meat products, soups, gravy), and leftovers that have not been properly cooled and reheated

Symptoms: Abdominal cramps, bloating and gas, diarrhea, nausea, loss of appetite, weight loss, fatigue, and muscle aches

Incubation period: 6 to 24 hours (average 10 hours)

Prevention: Properly reheat, hot-hold, and cool potentially hazardous foods such as gravy, soup, and other products high in starch and protein

Common Foodborne Illnesses

Cryptosporidium spp. (parasite)

Common sources: Untreated drinking water, fruits, and vegetables

Symptoms: Abdominal cramps and diarrhea, nausea and vomiting, fever, body aches, and fatigue

Incubation period: 7 to 10 days (average 7 days)

Prevention: Wash fruits and vegetables prior to eating; avoid ingesting contaminated water

Cyclospora cayetanensis (parasite)

Common sources: Various types of imported fresh produce (e.g., raspberries, basil, snow peas, and lettuce)

Symptoms: Bloating, gas, nausea, watery diarrhea, loss of appetite, weight loss, and fatigue

Incubation period: 1 to 2 weeks

Prevention: Wash fruits and vegetables prior to eating; follow food recall warnings issued by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency

Common Foodborne Illnesses

Escherichia coli (bacteria):

Common sources: Raw or undercooked ground beef, unpasteurized dairy products and juices, raw fruits and vegetables (especially leafy greens and sprouts), and untreated drinking water

Symptoms: Nausea and vomiting, severe abdominal cramps and diarrhea (sometimes bloody), headache, and fever; additional complications may include, hemolytic uremic syndrome and kidney failure, seizures, and stroke

Incubation period: 1 to 10 days (average 3 to 4 days)

Prevention: Cook ground beef to 71 C/160 F (well done); only drink pasteurized milk; wash fruits and vegetables prior to eating; avoid cross-contamination of food and work surfaces (e.g., store ground beef and other raw meats below or away from ready-to-eat foods)

Giardia spp. (parasite):

Common sources: Untreated drinking water, fruits, and vegetables

Symptoms: Nausea, diarrhea (often foul-smelling), and fever/chills

Incubation period: 7 to 14 days (average 7 days)

Prevention: Wash fruits and vegetables prior to eating; avoid ingesting contaminated water

Common Foodborne Illnesses

Hepatitis A (virus):

Common sources: Produce and ready-to-eat food, water, raw oysters, and undercooked shellfish

Symptoms: Fatigue, fever, nausea and vomiting, loss of appetite, joint pain, jaundice, and dark urine; symptoms can be asymptomatic (no signs of illness)

Incubation Period: 2 to 6 weeks (average 28 days)

Prevention: Avoid eating raw oysters or undercooked shellfish; get vaccinated for Hepatitis A

Listeria monocytogenes (bacteria):

Common sources: Unpasteurized dairy products (especially soft cheeses), ready-to-eat meats (e.g., deli meats, pâté, hot dogs), smoked fish, and raw fruits and vegetables

Symptoms: Nausea and vomiting, abdominal cramps and diarrhea, fever, headache, and muscle aches; illness may progress to nervous system involvement (e.g., stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance); infection during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage or stillbirth

Incubation period: 3 days to 4 weeks; may be as long as 70 days

Prevention: Avoid consuming deli meats, soft cheeses, and other high-risk foods during pregnancy; follow food recall warnings issued by CFIA

Common Foodborne Illnesses

Norovirus (virus):

Common sources: Contaminated water, shellfish, or any food contaminated by a sick food handler

Symptoms: Nausea and vomiting, abdominal cramps and diarrhea, fever/chills, headaches, muscle aches, and fatigue

Incubation period: 12 to 48 hours

Prevention: Avoid eating raw oysters or undercooked shellfish; do not handle or prepare food when ill with vomiting or diarrhea

Salmonella spp. (bacteria):

Common sources: Raw or undercooked poultry, eggs, pork and ground beef, unpasteurized dairy products, raw fruits and vegetables, and pets (especially amphibians and reptiles)

Symptoms: Abdominal cramps, diarrhea, and fever; may lead to systemic infection, reactive arthritis

Incubation period: 6 to 72 hours

Prevention: Cook whole poultry to 82 C/180 F and cook pieces of poultry to 74 C/165 F; practice proper handwashing before handling food and after touching pets

Common Foodborne Illnesses

Shigella spp. (bacteria):

Common sources: Foods that require a lot of handling during preparation

Symptoms: Abdominal cramps and diarrhea (often bloody and with mucous), nausea and vomiting, and fever; illness may progress to systemic infection, Reiter's syndrome (chronic arthritis), seizures, and hemolytic uremic syndrome (kidney failure)

Incubation period: 12 hours to 7 days (average 1-3 days)

Prevention: Practice proper handwashing when handling food items (especially ready-to-eat foods)

Staphylococcus aureus (bacteria):

Common sources: Foods that require a lot of handling during preparation

Symptoms: Produces a toxin that can cause nausea and vomiting, abdominal cramps, and diarrhea

Incubation period: 30 minutes to 8 hours

Prevention: Practice proper handwashing when handling food items (especially ready-to-eat foods); store bacon and other salty foods out of the danger zone

Common Foodborne Illnesses

Yersina enterocolitica (bacteria)

Common sources: Undercooked pork and unpasteurized milk

Symptoms: Diarrhea (often bloody), fever, and abdominal pain (often on the right side of the abdomen); may progress to skin rash, joint pain, and septicemia

Incubation period: 4 to 7 days

Prevention: Cook pork to 71 C/160 F; only drink pasteurized milk; avoid cross-contamination of food and work surfaces

Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP)

HACCP is a food safety system that was developed in the 1950s by The Pillsbury Company, Natick Research Laboratories, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Its purpose was to ensure food safety for astronauts and space personnel (refer to www.foodqualityandsafety.com and search for The Evolution of HACCP). HACCP principles have since been adopted across the food industry, including processing plants, grocery stores, and restaurants.

HACCP can be divided into three parts:

1) Conduct a hazard analysis of all foods served/sold in food premises to determine the likelihood that these foods or their preparation practices may cause foodborne illness.
2) Next, determine critical control points to help reduce the risk of foodborne illness. Critical control points are steps in food preparation where hazards can be prevented, eliminated, or controlled. Examples of critical control points include proper handwashing, proper food storage temperatures, and proper cooking temperatures.
3) Finally, implement procedures for monitoring the identified critical control points and take corrective action when indicated by the results. Examples of monitoring procedures include recording refrigerator temperatures in a log sheet/record book, and using a probe thermometer to monitor the internal temperature of foods during the cooking process.

Food Service Premises Operator Information Guide

Niagara Region

niagararegion.ca/health

Water Disruptions at Food Premises

A water disruption is defined as loss of running water under pressure to all areas of a premise. A water disruption may occur due to a planned service interruption (e.g. as part of regular maintenance or as part of scheduled construction work) or due to an emergency situation (e.g. a water main break).

The Ontario Food Premises Regulation 493/17 requires that "every food premise shall be provided with

a) A supply of water adequate for the operation of the premises

b) Hot and cold running water under pressure in areas where food is processed, prepared, or manufactured or where utensils are cleaned".

Foodborne illness outbreaks can occur if running water is not available, as running water is essential for proper handwashing and for cleaning and sanitizing purposes. Therefore, operation of a food service premise without running water is considered a health hazard under the Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act.

It is the responsibility of food premise owners and operators to take appropriate action once they realize that their facility has been affected by a water disruption. No food preparation may occur during the disruption, as proper handwashing is not possible. Glove use, moist towelettes, hand sanitizer, and/or dipping hands into buckets of water are not appropriate substitutes for handwashing in a food preparation setting.

Water Disruptions at Food Premises

In most cases, food premises would be required to close until water services has been restored. A premise that decides to operate without running water, may face legal action. An exception is for those premises that sell only pre-packaged food items or those who can provide an approved contingency plan as they may be permitted to remain open during the disruption. Owners/operators must discuss their plan to operate with a public health inspector in these circumstances.

Municipalities typically inform Niagara Region Public Health and Emergency Services about extended water disruptions in their city. Public health inspectors will then attempt to contact food premises within the affected area. Once the disruption has been resolved, premise owners and operators should follow directions from municipal water services before reopening and resuming food handling practices. If no instructions are provided, it is advisable to flush all faucets with cold water until the water runs clear, free of discolouration and/or sediment, and then continue to run the water for an additional five minutes.

Storage Guide

General guidelines for the shelf life of common foods.
Read the label and check 'best before and expiry' dates if applicable.

Best before date

A best before date is the durable life period of prepackaged food. Durable life is the estimated amount of time that an unopened food product, when stored properly, will retain its:

- Freshness
- Taste
- Nutritional value
- Any other qualities claimed by the manufacturer

Best before dates do not guarantee product safety. It provides information about the freshness and potential shelf-life of unopened foods. Most foods are safe to eat if stored longer, but flavour and nutritional value will deteriorate. Discard if there is evidence of spoilage.

Expiry date

An expiration date is not the same as a best before date. Expiration dates are only required on certain foods (e.g., infant formula, nutritional supplements, meal replacements). Check food products expiration dates, if the date has passed, food should not be bought, sold, or eaten. Food should be discarded.

Food Service Premises Operator Information Guide

Niagara Region

niagararegion.ca/health

Cupboard

Unless otherwise specified, times apply to unopened packages.
(room temperature)

Cereal grains

(once opened, store in airtight containers, away from light and heat)

Bread crumbs	3 months
Cereals (ready-to-eat)	8 months
Cornmeal	6 – 8 months
Crackers	6 months
Pasta	Several years
Rice	Several years
Rolled oats	6 – 10 months
White flour	1 year
Whole wheat flour	3 months

Canned foods

Discard any metal cans with swollen sides or ends, flaws in the seams, rust, dents, leaks, or bad smelling contents. (once opened, store covered in airtight container in refrigerator)

Evaporated milk	9 – 12 months
Other canned foods	1 year

Dry foods

(once opened, store in airtight containers, away from light and heat)

Baking powder and baking soda	1 year
Beans, peas, and lentils	1 year
Chocolate (baking)	7 months
Cocoa	10 – 12 months
Coffee (ground)	1 month
Coffee (instant)	1 year
Coffee whitener	6 months
Fruit (dried)	1 year
Gelatin	1 year
Jelly powder	2 years
Mixes (cake, pancake, and biscuit	1 year
Mixes (pie filling and pudding)	18 months
Mixes (main dish accompaniments	9 – 12 months
Potatoes (flakes)	1 year
Skim milk powder - Unopened	1 year
Skim milk powder - Opened	1 month
Sugar (all types)	Several years
Tea bags	1 year

Miscellaneous foods

Honey	18 months
Jam and jellies (once opened, covered in fridge	1 year
Mayonnaise and salad dressings - unopened	6 months
Mayonnaise and salad dressings - opened (covered in fridge)	1 – 2 months
Molasses	2 years
Nuts	1 month
Peanut butter - unopened	6 months
Peanut butter - opened	2 months
Pectin – liquid	1 year
Pectin – liquid – opened (covered in fridge)	1 month
Pectin – powdered	2 years
Sandwich spread (once opened, covered in fridge)	8 months
Syrups – corn, maple, and table	1 year
Vegetable oils (once opened, covered in fridge)	1 year
Vinegar	Several years
Yeast (dry)	1 year

Vegetables

Potatoes, rutabaga, and squash	1 week
Tomatoes - cool room (7-10 C, 45-50 F)	1 week
Onions (dry, yellow skin)	6 weeks
Potatoes (mature)	6 months
Rutabaga (waxed)	Several months
Squash (winter)	Several months

Refrigerator

Unless otherwise specified, cover all foods. (4 C, 40 F)

Dairy products and eggs

(check 'best before' dates)

Butter - unopened	8 weeks
Butter - opened	3 weeks
Cheese - cottage (opened)	3 days
Cheese - firm	Several months
Cheese - processed (unopened)	several months
Cheese - processed (open)	3 – 4 weeks
Eggs	3 weeks
Margarine - unopened	8 months
Margarine - opened	1 month
Milk, cream, and yogurt (opened)	3 days

Fish and shellfish

Clams, crab, lobster, and mussels (live)	12 – 24 hours
Fish (cleaned) - raw	3 – 4 days
Fish (cleaned) - cooked	1 – 2 days
Oysters (live)	24 hours
Scallops and shrimp (raw)	1 – 2 days
Shellfish (cooked)	1 – 2 days

Fresh fruit (ripe)

Apples	2 months
Apples - purchased February to July	2 weeks
Apricots (store uncovered)	1 week
Blueberries (store uncovered)	1 week
Cherries	3 days
Cranberries (store uncovered)	1 week
Grapes	5 days
Peaches (store uncovered)	1 week
Pears (store uncovered)	1 week
Plums	5 days
Raspberries (store uncovered)	2 days
Rhubarb	1 week
Strawberries (store uncovered)	2 days

Fresh vegetables

Beans (green and wax)	5 days
Beets	3 – 4 weeks
Broccoli	3 days
Brussels sprouts	1 week
Cabbage	2 weeks
Carrots	Several weeks
Cauliflower	10 days
Celery	2 weeks
Corn	Use same day
Cucumbers	1 week
Lettuce	1 week
Mushrooms	5 days
Onions	1 week
Parsnips	Several weeks
Peas	Use same day
Peppers (green, red, etc.)	1 week
Potatoes (new)	1 week
Spinach	2 days
Sprouts	2 days
Squash (summer)	1 week

Meat and poultry

Uncooked

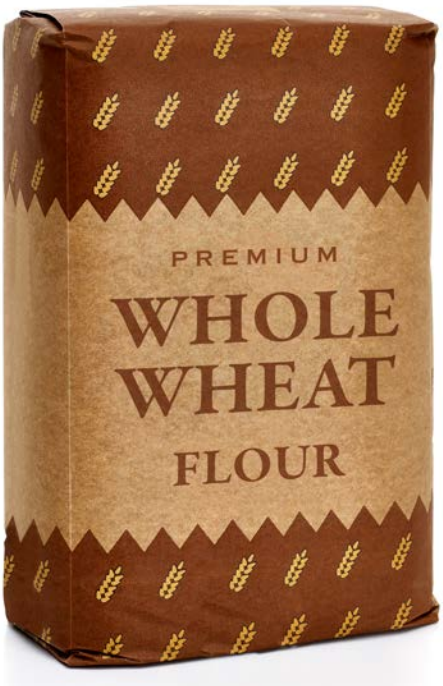
Chops and steaks	2 – 3 days
Cured or smoked meat	6 – 7 days
Ground meat	1 – 2 days
Poultry	2 – 3 days
Roasts	3 – 4 days
Variety meats and giblets	1 – 2 days

Cooked

All meats and poultry	3 – 4 days
Casseroles, meat pies, and meat sauces	2 – 3 days
soups	2 – 3 days

Miscellaneous foods

Coffee (ground)	2 months
Nuts	4 months
Shortening	12 months
Whole wheat flour	3 months



Food Service Premises
Operator Information Guide

Niagara Region

niagararegion.ca/health

Freezer

Use freezer wrapping or airtight containers. Freeze fresh food at its peak condition. (-18 C, 0 F)

Dairy products and fats

Butter - salted	1 year
Butter - unsalted	3 months
Cheese – firm, processed	3 months
Cream – table, whipping (separates when thawed)	1 month
Ice cream	1 month
Margarine	6 months
Milk	6 weeks

Fish and shellfish

Fish (fat species: lake trout, mac kerel, and salmon)	2 months
Fish (lean species: cod, haddock, pike, and smelt	6 months
Shellfish	2 – 4 months

Fruits and vegetables

Fruits and vegetables	1 year

Meat, poultry, and eggs

Uncooked

Beef (roasts and steaks)	10 – 12 months
Chicken and turkey - cut up	6 months
Chicken and turkey - whole	1 year
Cured or smoked meat	1 – 2 months
Duck and goose	3 months
Eggs (whites and yolks)	4 months
Ground meat	2 – 3 months
Lamb (chops and roasts)	8 – 12 months
Pork (chops and roasts)	8 – 12 months
Sausages and wieners	2 – 3 months
Variety meats and giblets	3 – 4 months
Veal (chops and roasts)	8 – 12 months

Cooked

All meat	2 – 3 months
All poultry	1 – 3 months
Veal (chops and roasts)	3 months

Miscellaneous foods

Bean, lentil, and pea casseroles	3 – 6 months
Breads (baked or unbaked, yeast)	1 month
Cakes and cookies (baked)	4 months
Herbs	1 year
Pastries, quick bread (baked)	1 month
Pastry crust (unbaked)	2 months
Pie (fruit, unbaked)	6 months
Sandwiches	6 weeks
Soups (stocks and cream)	4 months

Food Service Premises Operator Information Guide

Niagara Region

niagararegion.ca/health

Niagara Region

niagararegion.ca/health