

What to do I do if there is something wrong with my food?

In the UK we are very lucky to have robust food safety and hygiene legislation in place. Most food businesses strive to ensure that they deliver safe food to consumers. However, there sometime things can go wrong. Unfortunately, there are also some less scrupulous people in the food market.

It can be very upsetting to discover the food you've purchased is not of the quality expected. However, it does not always mean that the food is a public health risk or that a crime has been committed. This document lists some frequently found food issues and our recommendations about the action you should take.

If you have a concern about hygiene at a business within the Royal Borough of Greenwich, or the food issue you have is not covered by this document, please contact us on food.concerns@royalgreenwich.gov.uk

COMMON ISSUES WITH CANNED FOODS

Field insects, wasps and fruit flies

Insects live naturally in fields and may be harvested along with fruit and vegetables. Whilst food companies take steps to remove these insects, some will be missed. These insects and grubs are killed and sterilised by the canning process.

Action: Although it is unpleasant to find insects in your food there is no public health risk. You should take the product (can or packaging) and your receipt back to where you purchased the product, and they will inform supplier/manufacturer.

Stones in canned peas

During harvesting, sometimes small stones can be accidentally collected too. Stones of certain size, weight and appearance can be missed during the sorting process. As long as the manufacturer can show that all reasonable precautions were taken to try to stop this from happening, it is accepted that some stones will end up in finished product.

Action: There is limited public health risk. If you have damaged a tooth or cut your mouth as a result of stones in canned vegetables, we cannot act on your behalf in these matters. You should take the product (can or packaging) and your receipt back to where you purchased the product, they will inform supplier/manufacturer. You can seek independent legal advice from a solicitor, if you wish.

Larvae / Grubs in canned vegetables

Like fully developed insects, small grubs may be found in canned vegetables, particularly tomatoes and sweetcorn. Their colour is often cream to greenish brown with long dark and pale bands, but this is variable. They can be up to 4cm in length. People think they may be maggots or caterpillars. These are moth larvae that live inside the food and are difficult to see during growing and processing. The larvae are killed and sterilised by the canning process, so they are not a health risk. Every effort is made to control these pests while crops are growing. But you may find these larvae in food as the use of pesticides in food crops has decreased and there is an increase in the use of organic produce, where crops are not sprayed with any chemicals.

Action: Although unpleasant to find a grub in the food, there is no public health risk. You should take the product (can or packaging) and your receipt back to where you purchased the product and they will inform supplier/manufacturer.

White spots in tinned grapefruit

Sometimes, tinned grapefruit will be covered in white specks that look like mould. Also, the liquid in the tin may be cloudy. This is actually a natural constituent of the grapefruit called "Naringin" and it gives the fruit its distinctive bitter taste. Variations in the weather cause an increase in the amount of Naringin the fruit contains and when canned, this excess Naringin crystallizes out. The product is safe to eat.

Action: There is no public health risk. If you are unhappy with quality of the product you could take the product (can or packaging) and your receipt back to where you purchased the product and speak to their customer service team.

Mould

Dented, damaged or incorrectly processed cans may allow mould growth to occur. This could indicate an error in production and poor handling during storage or distribution. It is difficult to establish who is responsible for this type of damage to canned foods. Simply knocking or dropping a can may cause mould growth. Affected foods should not be consumed.

Action: You should not eat this food and it is best to return the product to where you purchased it and speak to their customer service team.

Glass-like crystals in canned fish - Struvite

Certain naturally occurring elements found in fish develop into hard crystals during the canning process. They are a harmless compound of magnesium ammonium phosphate. This is especially common in canned salmon. These crystals may be mistaken for glass fragments. They are not harmful and will be broken down by stomach acids when swallowed. You can tell the difference between Struvite and glass by doing simple test at home. Struvite crystals are soluble in a hot dilution of vinegar or lemon juice and water when gently heated for up to 15-20 minutes (the crystals will not dissolve completely in this time but will reduce in size). Glass will not dissolve.

Action: You should heat gently in vinegar or lemon juice and water for 15-20 minutes. If the crystal does not dissolve or crush, then it could be glass, please contact us for advice. If the crystal dissolves, it is struvite. There is no public health risk, so we would advise you to eat the product, but if you are still concerned, you can take the product and receipt back to place of purchase and speak with their customer service team.

COMMON ISSUES WITH FISH

Glowing fish - Luminous marine bacteria

Luminous bacteria can sometimes be found on seafood. Crabmeat, cooked shrimps, prawns, or processed seafood products made from Surimi. These are the most common seafood associated with luminescence or glowing. When seafood glows it means that luminous bacteria are present, the light is produced by a reaction with a substance in the bacteria, oxygen and water, similar to the reaction which makes fireflies glow.

Action: This is not a public health risk. If you are concerned, you can take the product and receipt back to place of purchase and speak with their customer service team.

Cod worm

White fish such as cod or haddock may be infested with small, round, cream to brownish coloured worms found in the flesh. These worms, known scientifically as *Phocanema decipiens*. This is alarming to see but the worms are harmless if consumed. The worms are killed by the cooking and freezing process. The affected parts of the fish are usually cut away but occasionally some may be missed in fresh fish and a worm may be discovered alive. The incidence of infected fish is very small in relation

to the thousands of tonnes of fish landed each year.

Action: There is no public health risk. You can take the product and receipt back to place of purchase and speak with their customer service team.

Fish bones

Fish naturally contain bones. Whilst the manufacturers take every care to remove these bones, in products such as fish fingers and other fish products a few may remain due to the way that the products are manufactured. Bones from a certain part of the fish may resemble a piece of plastic, being broad, flat and flexible in appearance. The manufacturer should state on the packing that bones may be present.

Action: If you are unhappy with the presence of bone in the product, you can take the product and receipt back to place of purchase and speak with their customer service team.

Sea lice

Sea lice refers to several species of parasitic copepods that are commonly found on fish in the marine environment. They have been found in salmon, stickleback, herring and rainbow trout. The lice usually fall off or are cleaned off during harvesting or processing.

Action: Sea lice do not affect human health, there is no known public health risk. If you are unhappy with the quality of the product, you can take the product and receipt back to place of purchase and speak with their customer service team.

ISSUES WITH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Stones, soil & slugs

Fruit and vegetables commonly have soil, stones or small slugs and snails adhering to them. This is quite normal as they originate in the soil.

Action: There is no public health risk. You should thoroughly examine, wash and rinse all fruit and vegetables before eating them.

Greenfly and other small and flying insects

Salad vegetables (especially lettuce) may have greenfly or other small insects attached. Insects are not harmful but can be difficult to wash off salad vegetables. They are becoming more common as the use of pesticides decreases. Unless your product, even if it comes in packaging, says "Washed and ready to eat" you should assume that it is contaminated.

Action: There is no public health risk. You should thoroughly examine, wash and rinse all fruit and vegetables before eating them. If you are unhappy with the quality of the product, you can take the product and receipt back to place of purchase and speak with their customer service team.

Mould

Mould growth will naturally occur when fruit and vegetables become damaged and bruised, or if stored for too long.

Action: There should be no public health risk. Do not consume mouldy fruit or vegetables. We recommend that you check the produce before purchase and handle/store it carefully after purchase.

Mould in fruit juice and food cartons

Cardboard juice and food cartons may become dented and damaged if poorly handled during storage and distribution. This damage can cause small holes to occur in the seams of the carton that are not

visible to the naked eye. The tiny holes allow air to enter the carton causing mould to grow in the food or juice. It is only upon opening the carton that the mould is discovered. It is difficult to establish who is responsible for this type of damage to cardboard juice and food cartons.

Action: Affected food should not be consumed. If you are unhappy with the quality of the product, you can take the product and receipt back to place of purchase and speak with their customer service team.

Spiders in Bananas

It is possible for spiders to be accidentally imported with bunches of bananas. They hide within a 'hand' of bananas and are not seen. They are generally harmless but a bite from a large spider can be painful.

Action: If bitten try to catch spider and seek medical advice.

Insects in jam

It is very unpleasant to find insects in jam and preserves. These are usually wasps or fruit flies. These insects are naturally associated with fruit and fruit growing areas. Fruit flies are small and light and some get past the inspection process.

Action: There should be no public health risk. If you are unhappy with the quality of the product, you can take the product and receipt back to place of purchase and speak with their customer service team.

Larvae/Grubs/Insects in frozen vegetables

Please see the information for insects in canned foods, as the same applies to frozen foods.

Action: Although it is unpleasant to find insects in your food there is no public health risk. If you are unhappy with the quality of the product, you can take the product and receipt back to place of purchase and speak with their customer service team.

CHOCOLATE AND CONFECTIONERY

Bloom

Chocolate may develop pale brown or whitish patches called "bloom" if stored at changing temperatures. It is due to fat separation, and it may change the taste of the chocolate. It is not mould and it is not harmful.

Action: There is no known public health risk, and the product can be eaten. If you are unhappy with the quality of the product, you can take the product and receipt back to place of purchase and speak with their customer service team.

Crystals

Large crystals may form in confectionery and may be mistaken for glass. The crystals will dissolve in warm water.

Action: You should test with warm water if the crystals dissolve it is not a public health risk. If you are unhappy with the quality of the product, you can take the product and receipt back to place of purchase and speak with their customer service team.

If the crystals do not dissolve and they could be glass, and there is a potential public health risk. Please contact food.concerns@royalgreenwich.gov.uk

DRIED FOODS i.e. flour, sugar

Insects

Insects like beetles and weevils may infest dried products such as flour, sugar, milk powder, semolina and pulses if they are stored too long. These insects are not known to carry disease, but they breed

very quickly in warm, humid conditions and can spread into other food very quickly.

Action: If you discover insects after food has been open/stored in your home, or another persons home, for a while, you should dispose of all visibly infested packages in an outside waste bin. Thoroughly clean the cupboards using a vacuum cleaner paying particular attention to crevices, and immediately afterwards, empty the vacuum cleaner into an outside waste bin. Store new dried goods in airtight containers until you are sure that the insects have gone. Ventilate storage areas well.

If you discover the insects immediately after opening a new packet you should return item and receipt to place of purchase and speak with the customer service team.

Psocids - Small insects in flour

Psocids are very, very small grey or brown insects which are only very occasionally found in dry foods like flour, milk powder, sugar, semolina and because of this, you may see them in your kitchen cupboards too. They are harmless insects about 1-2 mm long, which can survive in dry powdery foods. They are not due to poor hygiene but like dark kitchen cupboards. They eat a wide variety of dried food products such as flour, cereals and the microscopic moulds that develop in humid conditions. They live for about six months, during which time they can lay up to 100 eggs. They breed very quickly and so spread into other food very quickly.

Action: All affected food should be removed and thrown away in a bin outside.

Check all remaining food including packaging and labels and throw away as necessary.

Thoroughly clean the cupboard using a damp cloth with a mild sterilising solution (following the instructions on the bottle and avoid using bleach and disinfectant solutions as these may taint food).

Dry the cupboard thoroughly before food is returned to the cupboard, use a hairdryer if necessary.

New dried foods should be stored in airtight containers.

Keep the kitchen and food storage cupboards well ventilated and dry.

If you discover the insects immediately after opening a new packet you should return item and receipt to place of purchase and speak with the customer service team.

MEAT OR POULTRY (CHICKEN/TURKEY)

Skin, bone or other animal material in a meat or poultry product

Products made from meat and/or poultry may contain small bones, skin, or parts of blood vessels. There will often be messaging on ackaging about the presence of bones. Finding these can be unpleasant but they are normal parts of the animal.

Action: There is limited public health risk. If you are unhappy with the quality of the product, you can take the product and receipt back to place of purchase and speak with their customer service team. If you have damaged a tooth or cut your mouth as a result of sharp bone, you should seek independent legal advice from a solicitor, if you wish.

Red leg, chicken looks red and undercooked

Sometimes even when chicken is thoroughly cooked, blood-like pink and red deposits can be seen, especially near the bone. This can be caused by marrow leaching from the bones in young poultry or be due to nitrates in the chicken.

Action: Never eat chicken that could be undercooked. We recommend taking a photograph of the cooked product and sending it to us at food.concerns@royalgreenwich.gov.uk we will try to determine whether spotting or undercooked. You can also contact the place of purchase to let them know this is separate to any investigation completed by us and we cannot be involved in any refund or compensation claim.

