

Food Complaints

Good Practice Guidance



This leaflet highlights some common food complaints together with a short explanation and suggestions for the best course of action.

Food Safety Officers are trained to investigate food complaints and assess the risks to health. If you need any advice please contact us. We'll be happy to help.

Tel: 01495 235340

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PLEASE NOTE THE FOOD SAFETY TEAM DOES NOT GET INVOLVED IN COMPENSATION ISSUES

Tinned Foods

Insects – occasionally, small grubs may be discovered in canned vegetables especially sweetcorn and tomatoes. The grubs are larvae of a moth, which lives inside the sweetcorn kernel or tomato, and are impossible to see before they are processed. Although it isn't pleasant to find a grub in your food, they are killed and sterilised by the canning process. As the use of pesticides decreases, these types of problems will increase.

Wasps & Fruit Flies – these are naturally associated with fruit and so often found in tins of fruit & fruit products e.g., jam, purees, fruit yoghurts etc. They do not carry disease.

Action: Contact the manufacturer
No Public Health Risk

Struvite – some naturally occurring elements in fish may develop hard crystals during the canning process. These crystals are not harmful and will be broken down by stomach acid if swallowed. Struvite is especially common in tinned salmon and will dissolve if placed in vinegar and gently heated for 15-20. Glass will not dissolve. We will undertake the examination at our laboratory.

Action: Contact the manufacturer
No Public Health Risk if struvite
Public Health Risk if glass

Mould – dented, damaged or incorrectly processed tins may allow mould growth to occur. Similarly, cartons used to sell fruit juice etc., may become damaged at

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some point. Damaging to the packaging seal may allow air to enter the product & mould to grow. This could indicate an error in production or storage.

Action: Contact the Food Safety Team
Possible Public Health Risk

Fish

Codworm – white fish such as cod or haddock may be infested with a small, round brownish/yellow worm found in the flesh. They are killed by cooking and are harmless to humans. The affected parts of the fish are usually cut away, but some may be missed.

Action: Contact retailer or supplier
No Public Health Risk

Curd found in Tinned Salmon – On occasions, white material resembling coagulated egg white may be found on the surface of flesh or embedded in the cavities between pieces of fish. The “curd” is a protein like material, which is present in raw salmon flesh and may separate out after cooking. The presence of the protein presents no public health risk.

Action: None, no Public Health Risk

Meat and Poultry

Skin, small bone fragments etc. - products made from meat and/or poultry may contain small bones, skin or parts of blood vessels. These are unsightly but rarely a health hazard as they are normal parts of the original animal. They may sometimes cause problems such as chipped tooth and these are best dealt with by the individual.

Action: Contact retailer or supplier
No Public Health Risk

Large bone fragments - These may pose a health hazard.

Action: Contact Food Safety Team
Potential Public Health Risk

Fruit and Vegetables

Stones, soil & slugs - (supplied unwashed) – fruit & vegetables commonly have soil, stones or small slugs adhering to them. This is quite normal as they originate from soil.

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Action: Wash all fruit & vegetables thoroughly before eating
No Public Health Risk

Greenfly – Salad vegetables, especially lettuce may have greenfly attached. This is becoming more common as the use of pesticides decreases, but they are not harmful.

Action: Wash all salad items thoroughly
No Public Health Risk

Mould Growth – occurs when fruit & vegetables become bruised or damaged. This will be minimized if the buyer checks the produce before purchase and handles it carefully afterwards.

Action: Return to retailer

Pre-washed and Packaged Ready to Eat Fruit / Vegetables

Foreign Bodies - These products are processed and should not contain soil or extraneous matter.

Action: Contact Food Safety Team
Possible Health Risk

Bakery Goods

Bakery Char - Bread and cakes may contain bits of overcooked dough, which has flaked off bakery tins. It does not necessarily indicate poor hygiene although they may be mistaken for rodent droppings, which are black, and regular torpedo shaped, whilst bakery char is grayish and uneven in shape.

Action: Contact Manufacturer
No Public Health Risk

Carbonised Grease - The machinery used to produce bread and cakes is lubricated with a non-toxic vegetable oil. Occasionally, some of this may become incorporated into the dough giving the product a grey/greasy appearance.

Action: Contact Manufacturer
No Public Health Risk

Dried Foods

Book Lice (psocids) – Dried products such as flour, sugar and pulses may contain small insects such as psocids (book lice). These do not carry disease,

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but they are unsightly and can eat through the paper of the packet. They breed very quickly in warm, humid conditions and so spread into uncontaminated food very quickly.

Action: Throw away all affected food, thoroughly clean/wash down cupboards with water & suitable detergent and dry thoroughly. Store new dried foods in airtight containers. Ensure good ventilation in kitchen/store cupboards. Contact Food Safety Team for advice.

Insects (weevils, beetles, moths, larvae etc) – Dried products can be infested with insects as a result of poor harvesting, inappropriate transport and storage conditions before and after sale. Whilst there is generally no public health risk an investigation may be appropriate to ensure food is being handled and stored correctly throughout the food chain. The food safety team will investigate insect food complaints providing the problem is discovered when first opening the product packaging and the durability date hasn't expired.

Action: Contact Food Safety Team for advice
Minimal Public Health Risk

Chocolate and Confectionary

Bloom – chocolate may develop a light coloured bloom if stored at too high a temperature. It is not mould but is due to fat separation and is not harmful.

Action: Return to retailer
No Public Health Risk

Sugar Crystals – large sugar crystals may form in confectionery and may be mistaken for glass. The crystals will dissolve in warm water. We will undertake the examination at our laboratory. Action: Contact Food Safety Team

No Public Health Risk if crystals
Public Health Risk if glass

Dairy Products

Crystals in Cheese – Calcium Lactate crystals appear naturally in some cheeses, particularly hard, matured or vintage cheese. The salt crystals form naturally when lactic acid and calcium combine during the drying out and ripening process. There is no health risk associated with the crystals, as they are part of the natural make up of the cheese.

Action: Contact the Food Safety Team
No Public Health Risk if calcium lactate crystals.
Public Health risk if glass

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