

YOUR GUIDE TO MAKING A COMPLAINT ABOUT FOOD



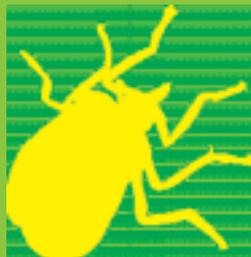


MAKING A FOOD COMPLAINT

Discovering a foreign object in an item of food can be an unpleasant experience. Food that is purchased from restaurants, takeaways, supermarkets and local shops must be fit to eat and free from contamination.

The Food and Safety Team receives many complaints relating to food each year. Foreign objects in food are the most common complaint, however not all pose a risk to health.

This leaflet is to give you information about who is the best person to complain to in the event of a food complaint and what you can expect.



WHO DO I COMPLAIN TO?

To the shop, manufacturer or supplier

- For relatively minor problems, it is best to complain directly to the company that sold you the food without involving the Food and Safety Team. These include:
- If you are not fully satisfied with the product and merely want your money back
- The complaint is not of a serious nature e.g. a part of a pea pod in a can of peas or a 'flat' carbonated drink

To the Food and Safety Team if your complaint is about:

- Food that is not safe to eat or actually makes you ill.
- Food that is so contaminated that it could not reasonably

be eaten i.e. mouldy pie

- Food that contains a foreign object e.g. glass in a loaf of bread.

To Trading Standards if your complaint is about:

- Chemical contamination of food or improper use of additives
- The composition of foods
- The adulteration of foods
- The labelling of food or misleading claims
- The nature of food e.g. haddock sold as cod.

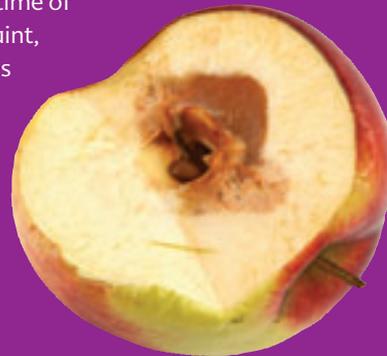
HOW TO MAKE A FORMAL COMPLAINT

Do not

- Handle or pull out any foreign objects found in the food - leave them in place.
- Eat any remaining or associated food e.g. a multi-pack of the product
- Send the food complaint to us in the post

Do

- Bring the food, packaging and receipt to our offices. In certain cases, arrangements can be made for an officer to collect the complaint from your home.
- If the food is perishable, refrigerate it or freeze it.
- Keep a note of the date, place and time of purchase, date and time of discovering the complaint, details of any witnesses to you discovering the complaint and how the food was stored and handled from purchase to discovering the complaint.



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- Your complaint will be allocated to an investigating officer who will contact you to discuss your complaint in detail within 3 working days.
- By their very nature, food complaints must be investigated in a prescribed manner because they could involve offences under food law.
- In order to enable the Council to proceed effectively with your complaint, it may be necessary for you to provide a statement or to agree to appear in court to give evidence - don't be put off by this. Your investigating officer will be able to help guide you through the process and advise you where necessary.
- By asking the Council to investigate, there are a few formal issues that must be resolved. You will be asked to release the food to us to enable us to examine it, permit us to investigate your complaint and dispose of the item once the investigation has been completed. You will also be asked not to contact the media or the retailer / manufacturer of the food once the complaint is left with us as this could hinder the investigation.
- The Council will, with your consent, disclose your details to the person responsible for your food complaint. It is not unusual for the food retailer / manufacturer to want to contact you to offer an independent explanation of what has happened.

WHAT ABOUT COMPENSATION?

- Our main concern when investigating food complaints is to prevent any further recurrences of the problem. Compensation is entirely a civil matter and one that the Food and Safety Team can not enter into.

WHAT IF MY COMPLAINT IS ABOUT POOR HYGIENE PRACTICES THAT I HAVE WITNESSED?

- If you have eaten or visited a food premises and consider their levels of cleanliness or food handling practices to be of a poor standard you can contact the Food and Safety Team. You will be asked to provide details of the premises concerned, details of the complaint and your own contact details.
- This information will be passed on to the investigating officer who will decide whether a visit is necessary to investigate your complaint.

THE INVESTIGATION

- If your complaint is about food that was prepared or manufactured in North Lincolnshire, we will visit the premises and investigate the complaint.
- If the food was prepared or manufactured outside North Lincolnshire, we will contact the manufacturer and relevant Local Authority who may investigate on our behalf.
- On some occasions, the investigation of a food complaint may involve extensive correspondence with a broad range of contacts both in this country and abroad.
- The investigation therefore may take some time. You will receive a progress report within 2 weeks of making the complaint and an update report within 8 weeks which will explain the results of any investigation and the proposed course of action taken by the Council.
- It may be the case that however apparently justified the complaint; it may not be possible to take formal action in respect of your complaint.
- However, the Council takes all food complaints seriously and will endeavour to ensure that justified complaints are responded to by those responsible and that improvements are put in place to prevent a recurrence.
- At all times you will have the opportunity to discuss your complaint with the investigating officer by contacting them at the address on the back of this leaflet.

HOW TO CONTACT US:

For further information or to discuss your food complaint with a member of the Food and Safety Team:
Tel: 01724 297827 | Fax: 01724 297898
Email: food.safety@northlincs.gov.uk.

If you prefer you can bring your food complaint to us the Food and Safety Team are based at:
Church Square House, 30-40 High Street,
Scunthorpe, DN15 6NL.

