

Food Matters in Bassendean



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Town of Bassendean food safety newsletter

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Note from the editor

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the third edition of our newsletter. Winter has arrived! It's time to turn up the bains-marie, get our flu shots and keep warm.

In this issue, you will find information on a common winter problem—sick staff. It is a serious issue which all food businesses and their staff need to know about.

You will also find out about the latest prosecution of a Bassendean food business, and how to make sense of the date labelling laws for packaged foods. As always, we hope you find this food safety newsletter both helpful and enjoyable.

If you have any questions that you would like addressed in the newsletter, please call the Town's Health section on (08) 9377 8000 or email: mail@bassendean.wa.gov.au

Turn up the heat: check bains-marie

Now that the cooler weather is here, it's important to check the performance of your bain-marie. You may need to adjust the bain-marie's settings so that it keeps up with the cooler conditions.

Remember, bains-marie need to maintain potentially hazardous foods at 60°C or more.

Keep your probe thermometer handy. The built-in thermometers on bains-marie, fridges and refrigerated display units should not be relied upon as they do not accurately measure the core temperature of the food.

Place the clean thermometer probe into the food and wait until the temperature reading has stabilised. To measure the temperature of packaged food, place the probe of the thermometer between the two packages. Adjust the bain-marie heat settings as required until you are sure that the core food temperature is maintained at or above 60°C.



Bacteria/microbiological food sampling

THE TOWN'S Health Section carries out a number of bacterial (microbiological) food sampling surveys throughout the year. The purpose of these sampling surveys is to ensure that food prepared and sold within the Town of Bassendean is being handled safely, stored under correct temperature control, not contaminated and safe to eat.

The Town has conducted a **bains-marie and pre-packaged meals** survey, during which ready-to-eat takeaway products were purchased and tested for bacteria levels.

The majority of foods tested returned satisfactory results. The results showed that, based on the types and quantities of indicator bacteria present, most businesses were doing a good job of minimising contamination and keeping foods at a safe temperature.

The good results: We are very pleased to announce that all food samples that were taken from bains-marie keeping foods at or above 60°C returned safe and satisfactory results! This just goes to show that keeping your food outside of the temperature danger zone **does** make a difference!

Unfortunately one food business was found to have sold a product that failed to meet the satisfactory microbiological standard. The results reflected poor hygiene practices and poor temperature control. This business is being investigated and could face legal action.

Thank you to all food businesses that participated in the sampling program. Remember, there is a good chance that we will be popping in to conduct food sampling at your food business next.



'Staph' food poisoning: from sneezing to sore tummies...

WHEN your sneeze contaminates food, your customers can be harmed by the germs carried within your nose and throat... even if you, the food handler, are feeling perfectly healthy.

Staphylococcus aureus, commonly called '**Golden Staph**' for short, is a species of bacteria that is carried in the nose and on the skin of around 30% of all adults. It is also found within infected skin wounds and can cause septicaemia (blood infection).

Golden Staph has the ability to produce harmful toxins which cannot be destroyed by cooking. The most common way for food to be contaminated with Golden Staph is via food handlers who carry the bacteria. Once food is contaminated, the bacteria multiply and produce toxins that can cause illness.

Food poisoning can be caused by ingesting foods contaminated with *Staph. aureus* toxins. Staph food poisoning results in nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, diarrhoea and dehydration. Symptoms develop 1 to 6 hours after the consumption of contaminated food and the illness can last for up to three days.

Stop Staph from entering the food supply:

- Wash and dry hands effectively. **Always** use designated single-use towels for drying hands. **Never** dry hands on the kitchen tea towels!
- If you sneeze, cough or wipe your face whilst working in a food business, you need to **stop** handling food and wash your hands before doing anything else!
- Do not handle food if you have a nose or eye infection, wound or skin infection on your hands or wrists.

Important!

Toxin levels increase as the bacteria population grows. Given the opportunity, bacteria numbers will double every 20 minutes! Keep cold food below 5°C and hot food above 60°C to prevent bacteria multiplying.

Sick staff and safe food

Food Business responsibilities: Attention proprietors and supervisors

IF YOU know or suspect that a staff member has an infected skin sore or runny nose and/or eyes, you must make sure this person takes all reasonable measures to prevent contamination of food.

For example, an exposed skin sore should be covered with a bandage and waterproof covering and someone with a cold or allergies could take medication to stop any nasal discharge.

Staff should be aware that they must wash their hands after blowing their nose, scratching their head, going to the toilet, or doing anything else that can contaminate their hands; prior to resuming food handling.

Beware of 'Bali Belly': staff should also be aware that if they have recently travelled overseas, they should not handle food if they recently or still are experiencing symptoms of food-borne illness.

Food businesses must do all they practically can to make sure that people on their premises do not contaminate food.



Exclusion from work

IF YOUR food business is aware that anyone handling food for the business (including friends and relatives) has or may have a food-borne illness, you must make sure that this person does not handle food or food contact surfaces.

A food business may suspect a person has a food-borne illness if they have vomiting, diarrhoea, fever or a sore throat with fever.

If a person has been excluded from food handling activities due to known or suspected food borne illness, the person cannot resume food handling until medical advice confirms they are no longer suffering from or carrying a food-borne illness.

Food legal news

Takeaway business pays the price for cutting corners during the lunchtime rush

Did you know that in WA it is illegal to sell food that does not meet customer expectations?

Earlier this year a Bassendean food business proprietor was found guilty of an offence under Section 21 of the *Food Act 2008*. The Court heard that the accused had served uncooked chicken within a burger, when in fact the consumer had ordered a cooked chicken burger.

The business admitted to occasionally rushing orders during peak hour. It was suggested that they pulled the chicken out of the cooker a few minutes early to keep up with the customer demand. By failing to cook the chicken properly, the business may have exposed their customers to harmful bacteria, which can lead to permanent damage, including death.

The Magistrate agreed that the food business had deliberately disregarded proper food safety practices and knowingly endangered the health of the public to enable the business to serve more customers.

The Court agreed that there was a need for deterrence to stop such matters coming before the Court again. The food business was charged a penalty of \$7000 plus ordered to pay \$1301 of the Town's costs.

This is only one of numerous cases in which a WA business has been charged for serving raw chicken and failing to meet the consumer demand. In 2011, Kwinana Chicken Treat was charged a \$30,000 global penalty with \$3416.40 of costs when they were found guilty of serving two raw chicken patties in their cheeseburgers.

If your food is sold when it does not meet consumers' expectations, be prepared to face penalties of up to \$250,000 per offence.

More food legal news ...

Date labels—what is the big deal?

Did you know that you could cop a hefty fine for incorrect date labelling?

Authorised Officers can issue on-the-spot fines of \$500 or worse; you could face Court which can result in fines of up to \$250,000. Some foods are safe to eat for an indefinite period whereas some foods will spoil and become hazardous if eaten. Even if a product stays safe for a long time, the quality may have degraded so that the food no longer meets the package description—meaning grumpy customers.

Unless specified below, your products **must** be date labelled and include the correct information.

'Best-before' or 'Use-by'? What is the difference?

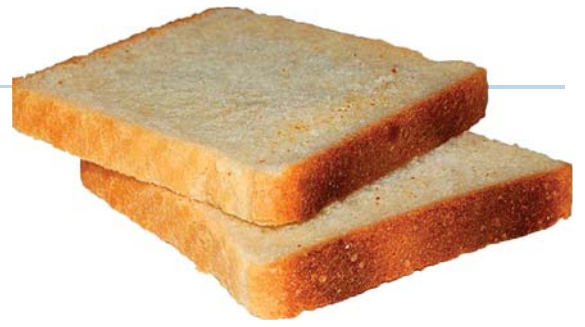
'Best-Before' date: the date which shows the end of the period during which the intact package of food, if stored in accordance with any stated storage conditions, will remain fully marketable and will retain any specific qualities for which claims have been made. Food can still be sold if it has past its 'Best-Before' date. If you intend to do so, it may be worth marking the items for quick sale to improve stock rotation and customer satisfaction.

OR

'Use-By' date: the date which shows the end of the estimated period if stored in accordance with any stated storage conditions, after which the intact package of food should not be consumed because of health or safety reasons.

It is illegal to sell food past its 'Use-By' date.

In the upcoming months, businesses will be monitored for compliance with the date labelling laws. Be sure to keep up to speed with your product codes and stock rotation. Remember: if you sell expired foods, expect to receive a fine.



What about bread?

Packaged bread with a shelf life less than 7 days, may include instead of a 'best-before' date:

- a **'baked-for' date:** means a date not later than 12 hours after the time the bread was baked
- a **'baked-on' date:** means the date on which the bread was baked.

Tell the consumer how to store it

Food labels must include any specific storage conditions required to ensure that the food will keep for the period indicated by the 'use-by' date or the 'best-before' date.

A package does not need a date label where:

- the best-before date of the food is two years or more; or
- the food is an individual portion of ice cream or ice confection; or
- the food is in a small package (a package with a surface area of less than 100 cm²), except where the food should be consumed before a certain date because of health or safety reasons.



For more information on food labelling laws visit:
www.foodstandards.gov.au

Recent prosecutions in WA:

Sale of food past its use-by date and food labelling offences

- Supermarket in the City of Bayswater: Sale of food that was labelled in a manner that contravenes labelling laws **and** sale of food past its use-by date—fine and costs of \$5990.
- Food business in the City of Vincent: Food for sale past its use-by date **and** not having food for retail sale bearing a label setting out all of the prescribed information—\$4150.
- Supermarket in the City of Kwinana: Sale of food past its use-by date—fine and costs of \$9356.
- Food business in the Shire of Mundaring: Altering food labels— penalty and costs of \$20,800.



For more information recent prosecutions you may visit: http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/825/2/notification_of_pm