



Best Before vs. Expiry Dates – What's the Difference?

As consumers, we've all struggled with understanding the difference between "best before" and "expiration" dates. But what does this date really mean?

Expiration dates indicate the last date by which its claim to the product's quality and nutritional value are guaranteed by the manufacturer. Expiration dates are typically used for products where loss of quality can have significant consequences such as nutritional supplements, medications, and baby formula/food. Do not consume the product if it is past the expiration date.

Majority of foods have a best before date, which refers to the manufacturer's recommendation for peak quality and freshness. Best before dates are used for products where the loss of quality is related to taste, texture, or freshness, and it is recommended that you check the date prior to purchasing. Examples of products with best before dates include baked goods, dairy products, canned goods, and pre-packaged snacks.

If you're considering using a product past its best before date, make sure to inspect it carefully for signs of spoilage. If the food appears to have mould growth, a change in texture, discolouration, and/or an off odour, it's likely spoiled. **When in doubt, always throw it out!**

Inside this issue...

2

Hazardous Foods vs.
Non-Hazardous Foods

3

Proper Equipment
Needed for
Dishwashing

4

Giving Back Safely:
Food Premises
Guidelines for
Donations

Hazardous Foods vs. Non-Hazardous Foods

A hazardous food is a food item that can support the growth of bacteria or formation of its toxins. Bacteria grow best within the temperature danger zone of 4-60°C, therefore hazardous foods must be stored in the refrigerator at 4°C or below or kept hot at 60°C or above at all times. Examples of hazardous foods include meat, seafood, eggs, rice, dairy products, pastries with cream-based fillings, cream cheese icings, etc.

To minimize the risk associated with hazardous foods:

- store these food items in the refrigerator promptly and never leave out at room temperature for more than 2 hours
- cook all meat and other hazardous foods to its proper **internal temperature**
- wash hands after handling raw meat

Non-hazardous foods, also known as low-risk foods, have a low risk of supporting the growth of bacteria. Non-hazardous foods can be kept at room temperature and do not require temperature control. Examples of non-hazardous foods include cookies, muffins, nuts, dry pasta, and whole fruits and vegetables. Although non-hazardous foods are considered low-risk and safe to store at room temperature, they can still grow mould. If you notice mould on any of your foods, always throw them out.

Understanding the difference between hazardous and non-hazardous foods is key to preventing foodborne illness and keeping your customers, and business, safe!

Shelf Stability Testing – When do you need it?

Shelf stability testing evaluates the quality of a food product over time. These tests can include examining the food product for any microbiological growth and determining food properties such as water activity and pH value. The result of shelf stability testing will help determine the shelf life and best before dates for a food product.

If you want to prepare hazardous foods and store them in the danger zone (4-60°C), your food product will have to undergo shelf stability testing. Common items that undergo shelf stability testing are:

- Canned foods/sauces
- Hot sauces
- Dried/salted meats
- Cream based pastries

Shelf stability testing is offered by various private laboratories across Ontario. You can find a laboratory that works for you on the [Standards Council of Canada website](#). If you have any questions about your specific food product related to shelf stability testing, reach out to your local health unit to speak with a public health inspector!



Food Allergy Canada has developed **Think Food Allergy**: a program offering fast, easy and FREE tools and resources for the foodservice industry. These resources can assist food business operators with their allergen management programs and help to create safer, more inclusive food experiences.

Proper Equipment Needed for Dishwashing

Food premises that prepare and serve food must have equipment for cleaning and sanitizing. Food premises that are take-out only and serve food in disposable containers must have at minimum a 2-compartment sink or a commercial mechanical dishwasher.

Alternatively, food premises that are dine-in, and use multi-use utensils (i.e. glassware, dishes, flatware, etc.), must have at minimum a 3-compartment sink or a commercial mechanical dishwasher.

What to do if the dishwashing equipment fails

If a mechanical dishwasher is unable to sufficiently sanitize utensils, there needs to be an alternative

method available for sanitizing. Operators can use a single sink, two-compartment sink, or three-compartment sink for sanitizing utensils after they are mechanically washed until the dishwasher can be repaired. However, if the mechanical dishwasher is unable to wash and sanitize utensils, you must have alternative equipment to clean and sanitize utensils such as a three or two compartment sink. Dine-in food premises that use multi-use utensils that only have a two-compartment sink must change their service and serve food and beverages in disposable containers with disposable cutlery until their dishwasher is repaired. If a premise does not have any operational dishwashing equipment, the premise must close until the dishwashing equipment is repaired and able to clean and sanitize utensils.



Applying for a special event or farmers' market in Durham Region this year?

Make sure you submit your coordinator application to the Health Department at least 45 days prior to the event and vendor applications must be submitted at least 30 days prior to the event. Here's to a successful and safe special event season!



Giving Back Safely: Food Premises Guidelines for Donations

In 2024, 1 in every 4 households in Durham experienced food insecurity.¹ Food donation is a great way to reduce waste while supporting the community. However, as a food premise operator, it's your responsibility to ensure donated food is safe and compliant with Ontario Regulation 493/17: Food Premises.

If your business prepares, receives or distributes food for donation, it is classified as a food premise under the Regulation and subject to inspection by your local Board of Health.

Compliance includes:

- proper temperature control of hazardous foods
- following sanitation protocols to prevent cross-contamination
- receiving foods prepared from an inspected premise
- routine monitoring for pest activity in your food premise
- food handler training is mandatory when foods are being prepared

Best Practices for Handling Donations:

- Accept or donate food that is safe, properly labelled, and not expired.
- Ensuring traceability by keeping records of donated and received food.
- Staff training on evaluating food packaging, interpreting dates for safety, and establish exclusion criteria.

Following these practices will help you protect consumers while making a meaningful impact! For more detailed information on safe food donation, please refer to the Ministry of Health's [Reference Document for Safe Food Donation](#).



1

<https://www.durham.ca/en/health-and-wellness/resources/Documents/HealthyLiving/FoodPovertyInDurhamInfographic.pdf>

Contact Us



durham.ca/foodsafety

Durham Region Health Department
Health Protection Division
101 Consumers Drive
Whitby, Ontario L1N 1C4
Telephone (within regional limits): 311
Telephone: 905-668-2020
Toll-Free: 1-800-841-2729
Fax: 905-666-1887
Email: EHL@durham.ca



Thank You,
Durham Region Health Department

