

Unattended Food Donations (Community Fridges)

Introduction and Scope

Food security and access initiatives are valuable and necessary for public health. The goal of this fact sheet is to prevent situations where consumers have to choose between food access and food safety. Foodborne illness is a risk that can be mitigated.

This fact sheet applies to food donations at locations that do not have an attendant or in-person supervision at all times. This includes community fridges, food boxes, and little pantries. They often consist of a cabinet, freezer, and/or refrigerator set up in areas of need; community members can take what they need and leave donations.

As long as food safety principles are integrated by people maintaining, donating to, and using the pantry or fridge, community pantries and refrigerators can be a safe solution to addressing local food security issues.

Guidance for Operators and Volunteers

- Construct donation site from smooth, non-porous, easily cleanable materials.
- Shelves and surfaces holding food should be of material that is easy to clean and disinfect, and is durable.
- If intending to provide perishable foods in controlled temperature appliances (fridge/freezer):
 - keep fridges between 0°C and 4°C;
 - in order to ensure frozen foods stay frozen it is recommend that freezers be maintained at -18°C or lower;
 - consider interiors with metal or shatterproof shelves;
 - add thermometers for temperature monitoring;
 - ensure thermometers are routinely calibrated and are accurate/functioning;

- have plan for power outages (notification, relocation of food, back up source, etc.)

Monitor your pantry often to ensure:

- It is clean, with no spills, pests, animal droppings or gnawed packaging;
- There are no rotting food or foods unsuitable as per donation guidance below;
- If waste or recycling receptacles are provided, ensure they are cleaned and emptied often.

Coolers or insulated boxes are not capable of keeping food at a consistent temperature. Food temperature will match the ambient temperature over time.

Provide contact information (i.e. poster or sign) for consumers to report issues.

Guidance for Food Donations

During sub-zero temperatures, donations should be limited to foods that are not damaged by freezing. Cans and other liquid containers may swell when frozen and compromised the product seal, thus compromising food safety.

Pantries/Locations with No Temperature Controlled Appliances

Donate These Items

- food purchased from approved food establishments;
- non-perishable foods (do not need to be stored in the fridge);
- foods stored in original, sealed containers with labels and in good condition.

Don't Donate These Items

- perishable food items (requiring fridge or freezer storage);
- food without labels or in damaged packages (dented or bulging cans, torn packaging, cracked jars);

- food that is contaminated by pests, chemicals or anything else;
- home-prepared foods, home-canned foods or leftovers;
- expired baby formula or perishable foods;
- open food or partially consumed product;
- mouldy or rotten foods.

Fridges and Freezers (Locations with Temperature Controlled Appliances)

Check thermometers prior to placing donations. If the fridge temperature is warmer than 4°C or freezer is above 0°C, contact the operators.

Donating perishable foods at unsafe temperatures can result in illness for consumers and/or food waste.

Donate These Items

- food purchased from approved food establishments;
- foods stored in original, sealed containers with labels and in good condition;
- non-perishable foods (do not need to be stored in the fridge);
- perishable foods – place in fridge and/or freezer.

Don't Donate These Items

- food without labels or in damaged packages (dented cans, bulging cans, torn packaging, cracked jars);
- food that is contaminated by pests, chemicals or anything else;
- home-prepared foods, home-canned foods or leftovers;
- expired baby formula or perishable foods;
- open food or partially consumed product;
- mouldy or rotten foods.

Guidance for Non-food Donations

Donations of non-food items should be kept separate from food items. This includes, but is not limited to:

- cleaning supplies,

- household paper products,
- clothing and foot wear,
- toys and books,
- pet supplies, including pet food, and
- diapers and wipes.

Guidance for Consumers

- Check the food you're taking – avoid mouldy or rotten foods and perishable foods at incorrect temperatures.
- When accessing food in fridge, check that the temperature is 4°C or less.
- When accessing food in freezers, check that food is solidly frozen.
- If something spills, clean it up.
- If something is broken or not maintaining temperatures, contact the operators.
- Consider hand hygiene - wash hands or use hand sanitizer before touching common touch items.
- Dispose of garbage in proper receptacle;
- Always prepare food safely. Follow these four steps to food safety:
 1. **Clean** - Wash your hands before preparing and eating food. Wash food preparation surfaces often. Wash produce prior to preparing.
 2. **Separate** - Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood and their juices apart from other food items.
 3. **Cook** - Cook food to a safe internal temperature.
 4. **Chill** - Refrigerate promptly. Chill leftovers and takeout foods within 2 hours. Keep the fridge at 4°C (40°F) or below.

For More Information

Contact your local public health inspector for further information on *The Food Safety Regulations*. Contact information for SHA public health inspection offices is available at:

<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/health/public-health/public-health-inspectors>