

Food complaints – information sheet

Bakery goods

Bakery char

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

Public health risk None
Action Contact manufacturer

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.

Public health risk None
Action Contact manufacturer

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.

Public health risk None
Action Return to retailer

Sugar crystals

Large sugar crystals may form in confectionery and may be mistaken for glass. The crystals will dissolve in warm water.

Public health risk None, if crystals
Action None

Public health risk Yes, if glass
Action Contact the food / health and safety team

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.

Public health risk None, if calcium lactate crystals
Action None

Public health risk Yes, if glass
Action Contact the food / health and safety team

Dried foods

Book lice (psocids)

Dried products such as flour, sugar and pulses may contain small insects such as book lice. These do not carry disease, 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.

Public health risk No
Action Throw away all affected food, thoroughly clean / wash down cupboards with water and suitable detergent and dry thoroughly.

Store new dried foods in airtight containers. Ensure good ventilation in store cupboards.

Contact the food / health and safety team for advice.

Insects (weevils, beetles, moths, larvae etc)

Poor harvesting, inappropriate transport and storage conditions before and after sale can cause dried products to become infested with insects.

Generally, there is no public health risk, but 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 has not expired.

Public health risk Minimal
Action Contact the food / health and safety team for advice.

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. During processing the affected parts of the fish are usually cut away, but some may be missed.

Public health risk None
Action Contact retailer or supplier

Curd found in tinned salmon

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

Public health risk None
Action None

Fruit and vegetables

Stones, soil & slugs

Fruit & vegetables commonly have soil, stones or small slugs adhering to them. This is quite normal as they originate from soil.

Public health risk None
Action Wash all fruit & vegetables thoroughly before eating

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.

Public health risk None
Action Wash all salad items thoroughly

Mould growth

Occurs when fruit & vegetables become bruised or damaged.

Public health risk None
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.

Public health risk Possible
Action Contact the food / health and safety team

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.

Public health risk None
Action Contact retailer or supplier

Large bone fragments

These may pose a health hazard.

Public health risk Potential
Action Contact the food / health and safety team

Tinned foods

Mould

Dented, damaged or incorrectly processed tins or cartons may allow mould growth to occur. Damage to the packaging seal may allow air to enter the product and mould to grow. This could indicate an error in production or storage.

Public health risk Possible
Action Contact the food / health and safety team

Insects

Occasionally, larvae may be discovered in canned vegetables especially sweetcorn and tomatoes. The larvae are of a moth that live inside the sweetcorn kernel or tomato and are impossible to see before they are processed. Although it is not pleasant to find larvae in your food, they are killed and sterilised by the canning process.

Public health risk None
Action Contact the manufacturer

Wasps & fruit flies

These are naturally associated with fruit and so often found in tins of fruit & fruit products, for example, jam, purees, fruit yoghurts etc. They do not carry disease.

Public health risk None
Action Contact the manufacturer

Struvite

Some naturally occurring elements in fish may develop hard crystals (which people think look like glass) 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 seconds, glass will not dissolve.

Public health risk None, if struvite
Action Contact the manufacturer

Public health risk Yes, if glass
Action Contact the food / health and safety team

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.

Public health risk None
Action Contact retailer or supplier

Large bone fragments

These may pose a health hazard.

Public health risk Potential
Action Contact the food / health and safety team