FOODSHARE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES
THE GREATER BOSTON FOOD BANK
FOR SHARING THEIR GRAPHICS AND CONTENT
FOOD SAFETY TRAINING FOR PANTRIES

ACCORDING TO THE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL, EACH YEAR 76 MILLION INDIVIDUALS GET SICK FROM FOODBOURNE ILLNESSES; 325,000 INDIVIDUALS ARE HOSPITALIZED; 5,000 INDIVIDUALS DIE.

WHY FOCUS ON FOOD SAFETY?

• EVEN THOUGH PANTRIES DO NOT PREPARE MEALS, CARE MUST ALWAYS BE TAKEN IN GIVING FOOD TO THE PUBLIC, ESPECIALLY TO POPULATIONS WITH A HEIGHTENED SUSCEPTIBILITY TO FOOD-BORNE ILLNESSES:
  o INFANTS, CHILDREN, ELDERLY, PREGNANT WOMEN
  o INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE UNDERNOURISHED, PHYSICALLY DISABLED, OR HAVE WEAKENED IMMUNE SYSTEMS

• DONATED PRODUCT IS DIFFERENT THAN RETAIL STORE PRODUCT:
  o DONATED PRODUCT IS OFTEN HANDLED BY MORE PEOPLE IN ITS LIFETIME THAN PURCHASED PRODUCT
  o IT IS HARDER TO ESTABLISH THAT EVERYONE HANDLING DONATED FOOD HAS HANDLED IT APPROPRIATELY
  o DONATED PRODUCT IS MOST LIKELY CLOSER TO CODE DATE THAN RETAIL STORE PRODUCT

• IN THE EVENT OF AN ILLNESS, ORGANIZATIONAL LIABILITY IS REDUCED ONLY IF YOU CAN DEMONSTRATE THAT PROCEDURES HAVE BEEN FOLLOWED TO MAINTAIN THE CHAIN OF FOOD SAFETY

HOW FOOD BECOMES UNSAFE:

• BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS SUCH AS BACTERIA, VIRUSES, PARASITES AND FUNGI CAN’T BE SEEN, TASTED, OR SMELLED AND CAN CONTAMINATE FOOD (THESE ARE CALLED PATHOGENS)

• CHEMICAL HAZARDS SUCH AS CLEANING PRODUCTS, SANITIZERS, PEST CONTROL POISONS, ETC. CAN CONTAMINATE FOOD

• PHYSICAL HAZARDS SUCH AS DIRT OR RUST ON TOP OF CANS, METAL SHAVINGS, GLASS FRAGMENTS, ANIMAL DROPPINGS, INSECT CASINGS, ETC. CAN CONTAMINATE FOOD

• PANTRIES ARE AT HIGHEST RISK FOR TIME AND TEMPERATURE ABUSE OF PRODUCT, WHICH MEANS LETTING FOOD STAY TOO LONG IN THE TEMPERATURE DANGER ZONE:
  o TEMPERATURE DANGER ZONE (41°F - 135°F) IS THE RANGE IN WHICH PATHOGENS GROW FASTEST
  o MEAT, POULTRY, FISH, SHELLFISH AND DAIRY PRODUCTS, WHETHER COOKED OR UNCOOKED, SHOULD NOT BE LEFT IN THE TEMPERATURE DANGER ZONE FOR MORE THAN 1 HOUR
  o ANY COOKED VEGETABLE, STARCH OR GRAIN PRODUCTS INCLUDING RICE, PASTA AND POTATOES SHOULD NOT BE LEFT IN THE TEMPERATURE DANGER ZONE FOR MORE THAN 1 HOUR
  o FROZEN PRODUCT SHOULD NOT REMAIN IN THE TEMPERATURE DANGER ZONE FOR MORE THAN 4 HOURS OVER THE COURSE OF THE PRODUCT’S LIFETIME
PROPER STORAGE ENVIRONMENT:

- **Access to Storage should be limited to authorized staff and volunteers who have an awareness of food safety issues**

- **Dry storage areas should be clean, dry, and pest-free:**
  - Clean storage areas regularly
  - Storage areas should be well ventilated
  - Keep the dry-storage environment between 50° and 70° F with humidity less than 60%
  - If there is a “musty” smell or there is condensation on walls, install a dehumidifier
  - Keep records of pest inspections and document what steps were taken if evidence of pests was discovered:
    - If you do not have a contract with a pest control service, create your own log that tracks inspections & treatments
    - Ensure that all access points for pests and vermin are sealed
    - Store cereals, grains, sugar & flour in airtight containers to prevent infestations

- **Food should be stored at least 6 inches above the ground and (ideally) 2 inches away from the walls:**
  - Prevents product from contamination should there be minor flooding
  - Reduces pest access
  - Allows for easier cleaning
  - To maximize storage, put non-food items on the floor or lowest shelf

- **Separate dry-storage product from chemicals:**
  - Store cleaning products and other chemicals in a separate room from food storage
  - If this is not possible, store such items on a separate set of shelves
  - Do not ever store cleaning products or chemicals above food items

- **Avoid storing product:**
  - Beneath water or sewer lines
  - Near heat sources such as ovens, forced air vents, or furnaces
  - Near windows that receive direct sunlight

- **Maintain cold-storage units appropriately:**
  - Ensure that refrigerators are holding temperatures between 33° F and 40° F
    - Below 32° F and product may freeze
    - Colonies of bacteria that cause foodborne illness can double in 20 minutes if food is stored in the Temperature Danger Zone (41° F - 135° F)
  - Ensure that freezers are holding temperatures between -10° F and 0° F
    - Food stored below 30° F may appear to be frozen, but certain yeasts and bacteria can continue to grow at 15° F
  - Record cold storage temperatures at least once a week
  - Clean and/or defrost all units at least quarterly
EVALUATING PRODUCT FITNESS – CODE DATES:

- Dates are printed on many food items, but product dating is **not required** by federal regulations except on infant formula and baby foods.

- **Closed dates**, packing numbers, or Julian codes appear as a series of letters and/or numbers and are created by the manufacturer:
  - Usually appear on shelf-stable products such as cans or boxes
  - Refer to the date or time of manufacture, not product expiration
  - Enable manufacturers to rotate their stock
  - Enable manufacturers to locate product in the event of a recall

- **Calendar dates** help stores determine how long to display product for sale:
  - Relate to the peak quality of food, not product safety
  - Found primarily on perishable foods, such as dairy, eggs, meat and poultry

- **Three common types of code dates:**
  - “Best if Used By” recommended for best flavor or quality; not a purchase or safety date
  - “Sell-by” date tells the store how long to display the product for sale; receive the product before this date expires
  - “Use By” the last date recommended for use of the product while at peak quality; the manufacturer of the product has determined this date

- Shelf-stable or frozen product that is past code date is generally safe to distribute; however, product color, taste, or nutritional content may be affected

- Refrigerated items should be distributed on or shortly after code date:
  - Eggs can be distributed 3-4 weeks after the sell-by date
  - Yogurt can be distributed up to 7 days past the sell-by date

- Based on product type, available code dates, or when the product was received, you should **determine a safe last date for distribution**:
  - It is assumed that most pantry consumers will use the product within a few days
  - Baby food and infant formula cannot be distributed past the use-by date
  - Canned goods can be distributed at least a year past code date
    - Low-acid canned goods can be distributed longer past code date than high-acid canned goods (e.g., potatoes vs. tomatoes)
  - Boxed pastas, rice, and beans can be distributed at least a year past code date
  - Non-frozen perishables must be distributed within or soon after code date
  - Retail meats frozen on or before the sell-by date should be distributed within 6 months

- See links to resources at the end of this guide for specific tips on distributing product past code date
EVALUATING PRODUCT FITNESS – CANS:

**THROW OUT CANS WITH:**

- Dented or pinched top or bottom rim
- Dents on the side seam or an incorrectly welded seam
- Deep dents that do not allow stacking (except for dry goods such as ground coffee, powdered drink mixes)
- Swollen or bulging end, or an end that gives when pushed (again, except for dry goods such as ground coffee, etc)
- Rust or soil that does not wipe off
- Dents around the score lines under a pull-tab; openings
- Leaks
- Dirt under a pull-tab top
- Mold or watermarks
- Evidence of exposure to temperature extremes (such as scorch marks or frost)
- Signs of insects, including egg cases, body parts, webs, and droppings
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings, or urine
- Dating past the acceptable safe date
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

**WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**
EVALUATING PRODUCT FITNESS – BOXES & BAGS:

**THROW OUT BOXES THAT HAVE:**

- Open tops or bottoms
- Contaminants inside the boxes
- Torn, leaking, or contaminated inner bags
- Inner bags with open seams or holes
- Mold or watermarks
- Signs of insects, including bugs in seams, holes, egg cases, webs, body parts, or droppings
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings, or urine
- Dating past the acceptable safe date
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

**THROW OUT BAGS OR SACKS WITH:**

- Rips, tears, punctures or holes
- Mold or watermarks
- Incomplete or incorrectly formed seals or seams
- Signs of insects, including bugs in seams, holes, egg cases, webs, body parts, or droppings
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings, or urine
- Dating past the acceptable safe date
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

**WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**
EVALUATING PRODUCT FITNESS – BOTTLES, JARS & POUCHES:

THROW OUT GLASS OR PLASTIC BOTTLES OR JARS WITH:

- Loose or broken caps
- Leaking screw tops
- Broken tamper-evident seals
- Other signs the cap was opened
- Foreign objects inside the container
- Unusual product separation
- Mold inside the container
- Dirt or other particles under the rim
- Signs of insects
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings or urine
- Signs the container was wet
- Cracks or chips
- Home-jarred foods
- Dates past the acceptable safe date
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

THROW OUT POUCHES WITH:

- Leaks, open seals, holes or punctures
- Cuts, cracks, or scratches deep enough to leak
- Mold or signs the package was wet
- Incomplete or incorrectly formed seals
- Folds or wrinkles (caused by one side longer than another)
- Foreign objects trapped inside pouch or interrupting the seal or seam
- Bulges on the seams
- Inflation
- Signs of insects or rodents
- Dating past the acceptable safe date
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!
Evaluating Product Fitness – Frozen Meats:

Throw out meats that have:
- A strong odor of spoilage
- Blood pooled on the underside of packaging
- Punctured or torn packaging
- A green tinge to the meat
- A sell-by date past 6 months

When in doubt, throw it out!

Meats are generally safe even if they have:
- A darker red or even brown color
  - This is due to oxygenation of blood
- “Puffy packaging”
  - Due to modified atmosphere packaging, where nitrogen or CO₂ is injected into the interior to prevent oxygenation and maintain the color of the meat
- Ice crystals are a sign that meat has partially thawed and refrozen; generally meat is still safe to consume

Receiving Product:

- Evaluate the source:
  - If you have consistently received marginal product from a source, bring this to their attention and explain your focus on food safety
  - If you have any concern that the source has not followed key food safety standards, ask for details about their operational practices
  - It is advisable that you do not accept
    - Prepared foods from restaurants or caterers
    - Prepared foods from organizations or individuals cooking in unlicensed kitchens
    - Meat that has not been processed in a USDA-certified facility (e.g. venison from a hunter)

- Evaluate product appropriateness and fitness:
  - Product should be appropriate for what you can safely store
    - If you don’t have adequate freezer space, don’t receive frozen product
    - If you don’t have adequate refrigerator space, don’t receive refrigerated product
    - If product cannot fit in your pantry area, consider not taking as much
  - Do not accept product that is currently or will soon be unfit for consumption
  - If such product is received, discard it immediately
RECEIVING PRODUCT (CONTINUED):

• KEEP RECEIPTS OF PRODUCT RECEIVED:
  o INDICATE SOURCE, DATE RECEIVED, ITEMIZE PRODUCT & QUANTITY
  o RECEIPTS CAN BE USED TO TRACK DOWN PRODUCT RECalls
  o RECEIPTS CAN BE USED TO THANK DONORS

• LABEL PRODUCT WITH A “DISTRIBUTE BY” OR “RECEIVED ON” DATE
  o IF THERE IS A CODE DATE ON THE PRODUCT:
    ▪ DETERMINE THE LAST SAFE DATE TO DISTRIBUTE THE PRODUCT
      (IT IS ASSUMED THAT MOST PANTRY CONSUMERS WILL USE THE PRODUCT WITHIN A FEW DAYS)
    ▪ LABEL THE PRODUCT WITH THE “DIST BY” DATE
  o IF YOU PURCHASED THE PRODUCT AND THERE IS NO CODE DATE, YOU CAN ESTIMATE THE “DIST BY” DATE
  o IF THE PRODUCT IS DONATED AND THERE IS NO CODE DATE, LABEL IT WITH A “RECEIVED ON” DATE
  o DISTRIBUTE PRODUCT WITH A “Rcvd” DATE BEFORE ALL OTHERS, AS THERE IS NO WAY TO DETERMINE HOW OLD IT MAY BE.

TRANSPORTING PRODUCT:

• BRING PRODUCT BACK TO YOUR STORAGE LOCATION IN THE SHORTEST TIME POSSIBLE

• ENSURE THAT THE VEHICLE IS CLEAN; DO NOT STORE CHEMICALS IN THE SAME AREA WHERE PRODUCT IS TO BE PLACED

• REFRIGERATED OR FROZEN PRODUCT SHOULD BE WRAPPED IN INSULATED BLANKETS OR PUT IN COOLERS DURING TRANSPORT

MAINTAINING INVENTORY – GENERAL RULES:

• OLDER PRODUCT SHOULD BE MORE ACCESSIBLE THAN NEWER PRODUCT
  o MOVE OLDER PRODUCT TO THE FRONT OF SHELVES
  o IF YOU HAVE SHELVING DEDICATED TO THE NEXT DISTRIBUTION, PUT OLDER PRODUCT FROM YOUR STOCKROOM ON THESE SHELVES

• DO NOT STOCKPILE LARGE QUANTITIES OF FOOD FOR AN EMERGENCY

• DO NOT OPEN PACKAGES AND SUBDIVIDE PRODUCT INTO SMALLER PORTIONS FOR DISTRIBUTION

• GO THROUGH YOUR ENTIRE INVENTORY QUARTERLY AND THROW OUT PRODUCT PAST THE “DISTRIBUTE BY” DATE OR SIGNIFICANTLY PAST THE “RECEIVED ON” DATE
MAINTAINING INVENTORY – COLD STORAGE:

- Do not overfill your cold storage units or place product too close to vents; cold air must be able to circulate throughout the entire unit.

- Go through all your refrigerated inventory weekly and throw out product past the “distribute by” date or significantly past the “received on” date.

- Go through all your frozen inventory quarterly and throw out product past the “distribute by” date or significantly past the “received on” date.

- To identify loss of power in the freezer, place a penny on top of water frozen in a bottle; if the penny sinks over time, the freezer has stopped working at some point.
  - If you cannot determine how long meat has remained unfrozen, discard it immediately.
  - Meat that has been in a full but non-functional freezer for less than four hours can be refrozen and distributed.

MAINTAINING INVENTORY – CHECKING FOR RECALLS:

- Check the USDA and FDA websites regularly for product recalls.
  - The USDA reports on meat, dairy and egg related recalls.
  - The FDA reports on all other food-related recalls.
  - Links to these sites are posted on the login page for Foodshare online ordering.

- Local and national news broadcasts about product recalls should lead you to find out details from the USDA or FDA websites.

- Check to see if any recalled product is or was in your inventory:
  - First review product receipts.
  - Visually inspect your inventory for affected product.

- If you have affected product in inventory, follow disposal and reporting guidelines associated with the recall.

- If you know that affected product has been distributed, contact pantry recipients.
  - Note: This requires keeping contact information for pantry recipients.
**Distributing Product:**

- Give out older product before newer product
- Do not distribute frozen food from a table unless it is insulated
- Do not thaw frozen meat to give to consumers as they may refreeze it at home; however, it is safe to refreeze bread
- Educate attendees about the safety of food past code date, when to consume food when time is a factor, and how to store food responsibly

**Resources:**

- [USDA Fact Sheets](#)
- [USDA Recalls](#)
- [FDA Recalls](#)
- [WWW.FOODSAFETY.GOV](#)
- Other resources
  - [Howcast](#): How to understand food expiration dates at the grocery store
  - The Food Keeper: [Get Information About a Specific Product](#)
  - The Food Marketing Institute (FMI): [Food Safety Center](#)
  - [ServSafe](#) Food safety training and certification