


## Guide to Common Food Complaints

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Finding something in your food that you think shouldn't be in it might give you a shock, but it will not necessarily harm you.

This guide provides information about some common problems, the health risk and what you should do.

So before reporting a problem, check if it is listed here for advice on how to proceed.

If after reading this guide you have a problem that is not included, or you are simply not sure, contact us so that we can consider the matter and decide if it is something we need to investigate further.

We can only investigate complaints about food purchased from businesses that are based in Barnsley. If the food was purchased outside the district, you will need to contact the local authority for the area where it was bought.

## Reporting a Food Problem

**Direct** – Telephone 01226 773743

**Online** – <https://wwwapplications.barnsley.gov.uk/SimpleEforms/Form/EForm/15>

You will need to provide the following information:

- Your name, address & contact information –Telephone / email
- The name & address of the premises you are concerned about.
- What the problem is. (Keep the food where it will be protected from contamination; perishable food should be bagged and frozen)
- When and where you purchased the food: date and time. (Keep any receipts available)

## Our approach to food complaints

Each report is considered on its own merits, and also the context of any known similar reports. Unsubstantiated complaints will not normally be investigated.

Our response is guided by four key factors:

1. Is there a possible public health risk?	If there is no apparent public health risk, we will not investigate the matter and you will be advised accordingly.
2. For certain types of report such as foreign bodies and off-food, we must consider the possibility of it having occurred at your home or business.	If the initial investigation indicates the problem could have arisen in the premises of the person reporting the matter, in most cases no further action will be taken and you will be advised accordingly.
3. Is the seller, producer or importer likely to be able to demonstrate that they have taken all reasonable precautions to avoid the matter complained of?	This question, which we refer to as being able to show “due diligence”, is the focus of all investigations; the answer is central to whether or not formal action might be taken. If our enquiries indicate they can show due diligence, then usually no further action will be taken and you will be advised accordingly.
4. Witness evidence	If our enquiries are pursued with a view to formal action be taken, we will need you to act as a witness to the facts of your complaint. Otherwise we cannot proceed. However, we may choose to deal with a complaint informally.

## When you are contacted about your report

You will be asked additional information as part of the information gathering process, including

- Specific details about: the purchase; the subsequent handling of the food; the discovery of the problem; the handling of the food after that point.
- What outcome you would like to see achieved following your report.
- Whether or not you are willing to act as a witness in court. (If you are not willing to act as a witness qualifying reports still will be investigated, but a prosecution is unlikely.)

The officer handling your report may visit you to assess the item complained and the place where it was discovered, and if appropriate to take it away. However, they may ask if you can send some pictures.

If, before they have possession of the matter complained of, they feel they have enough information to carry out a visit to the relevant business - they are likely to ask you to store the item, usually in your freezer.

We will only send items for analysis when it is considered such an examination will usefully support the investigation.

## Compensation claims

The Council cannot act on your behalf to seek compensation. You should contact the food producer and seek legal advice from a solicitor if you need assistance to pursue a claim.

CONCERN	ACTION
<b>Baked Foods</b>	
<p><b>Bakery char</b></p> <p>Bread and cakes may contain irregular shaped bits of overcooked dough which has flaked off bakery tins. Occasionally some flakes or drops may become incorporated with the dough and are mistaken for rodent droppings which are black and torpedo shaped whilst bakery char is greyish and uneven in shape.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Return to the retailer or contact the manufacturer.</p>
<p><b>Carbonised grease</b></p> <p>The machinery used to produce bread and cakes is lubricated with a non-toxic vegetable oil. Occasionally some may become incorporated into dough giving areas of the product a grey/greasy appearance and you may suspect there is dirt or oil in the food.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Return to the retailer or contact the manufacturer.</p>
<b>Chicken</b>	
<p><b>Blood in cooked chicken (red leg)</b></p> <p>Sometimes chicken that has been properly cooked appears to have blood around the bones and even penetrating the meat. This is particularly likely to occur with young birds; the potential occurrence is increased in frozen chicken. It is in fact fluid from inside the bones that has seeped out. The chicken will be thoroughly cooked but the temperature is not high enough to denature the pigment – and so the chicken has the immediate impression of being undercooked.</p> <p>It occurs quite often in fried-chicken products, reflecting the age of the chickens sourced. There is also a higher risk of occurrence in sous-vide cooking which is at a lower temperature.</p> <p>In a properly cooked chicken this will have been pasteurised and does not present a risk. If the surrounding meat is cooked then the chicken is cooked. The only way to ensure it will not occur is to overcook the chicken so that the protein content is denaturalised.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk when the meat is cooked through.</p> <p>If the meat itself is not cooked through - still having the appearance of fresh flesh, then contact Regulatory Services.</p> <p>When cooking chicken at home, ensure the chicken is thoroughly cooked and the juices are running clear. If in doubt test with a probe thermometer to ensure it has reached at least 75°C.</p>
<p><b>Green breast meat [Oregon disease]</b></p> <p>This is a condition found turkeys and chickens. Also known as deep pectoral myopathy, it is not a disease it is a condition caused by a reduction in blood supply to the deep pectoral muscles. Externally the chicken will appear and smell normal, but on carving an affected cooked chicken parts of the breast muscles will have a greenish appearance. The surrounding meat is normal.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Contact the retailer or manufacturer.</p>
<b>Chocolate / Sweets</b>	
<p><b>Bloom</b></p> <p>Chocolate may develop a light coloured bloom if stored at too high a temperature. It is not mould but due to fat separation and is not harmful.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Return it to the retailer or manufacturer.</p>
<p><b>Crystals</b></p> <p>Very occasionally large crystals may form in confectionery and may be mistaken for glass. The crystals will dissolve in warm water.</p>	<p>Test with warm water if the crystals dissolve, there is no public health risk. Return the product to the retailer or manufacturer.</p> <p>If the crystals do not dissolve, please contact Regulatory Services who will investigate further.</p>



CONCERN	ACTION
<b>Dried Foods</b>	
<p><b>Insects &amp; Psocids (“so-sids”)</b></p> <p>Insects like beetles, moth larvae and weevils may infest dried products such as flour, sugar, milk powder, pulses, seeds and semolina. These insects do not carry disease, but they breed very quickly in warm, humid conditions and spread into uncontaminated food very quickly. They are not a public health risk.</p> <p>Psocids are small grey or brown insects 1 – 2 mm long; they are occasionally found in dry powdery foods like flour, milk powder, sugar, semolina. You may see them in your storage cupboards too. They also occur as book-lice.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>If you have just purchased the product you could return it to the shop.</p> <p>Otherwise, dispose of all visibly infested packages in an outside waste bin. Thoroughly clean the cupboards paying particular attention to crevices, and immediately afterwards, empty the vacuum cleaner into an outside waste bin. Store new dried goods in airtight containers and ensure good ventilation in storage areas.</p>
<b>Fish</b>	
<p><b>Fish-bones</b></p> <p>Fish naturally contain bones. Whilst the processors take care to remove these bones, in products such as fish fingers and other processed fish product a few may remain due to the way that the products are manufactured. Bones from a certain part of the fish may resemble a piece of plastic, being broad, flat and flexible in appearance.</p> <p>Fish and fish products should always be consumed with a degree of caution because of the potential for bones to be present.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>If it is an isolated piece of bone, the fish can be eaten as usual.</p> <p>If you consider the amount of bone present is excessive, contact the supplier or manufacturer.</p>
<p><b>Codworm</b></p> <p>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. The affected parts of the fish are usually cut away, but some may be missed.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Contact the supplier.</p>
<p><b>Glowing seafood</b></p> <p>When seafood glows it means that luminous bacteria are present, the light is produced by a reaction with a substance in the bacteria, oxygen and water. It most commonly arises in crabmeat, cooked shrimps, prawns, or processed seafood shapes. The food is safe to eat.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Contact the supplier or manufacture.</p>
<p><b>Sea lice</b></p> <p>Sea lice refer to several types of parasitic commonly found on fish such as salmon, herring and rainbow trout in the marine environment. The lice usually fall off or are cleaned off during harvesting or processing.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Clean the fish, cook and eat as usual.</p>
<b>Frozen Foods</b>	
<p><b>Foreign bodies, stones etc</b></p> <p>The advice given for such findings in canned food also applies to frozen food.</p>	<p>Read the information given for Processed Foods, below</p>



CONCERN	ACTION
<b>Indian food</b>	
<p><b>Droppings, bits of wood</b></p> <p>Authentic pilau rice will often contain cardamom pods and other seeds that can be mistaken for rodent droppings or insects.</p> <p>Some authentic dishes may contain cinnamon stick, cinnamon bark or cassia bark – which may be mistaken for bits of wood.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Enjoy authentic cuisine.</p> <p>However, if you are really not certain, keep the suspect items and contact Regulatory Services.</p>
<b>Meat</b>	
<p><b>Skin, bone or other animal material</b></p> <p>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.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Remove the parts you don't like during preparation.</p>
<b>Processed foods in Tins etc</b>	
<p><b>Glass-like crystals in canned fish - Struvite</b></p> <p>Struvite crystals are a harmless compound of magnesium ammonium phosphate naturally present that may develop into hard crystals during processing. It is especially common in canned salmon.</p> <p>You can tell the difference between Struvite and glass by doing simple tests at home; Struvite crystals are softer than glass and can be scratched or crushed between two hard surfaces into a powder. Struvite will reduce in size if placed in vinegar and gently heated for 15-20 minutes. Glass will not dissolve.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Check for Struvite. If it passes the test then the product can be consumed normally. Otherwise contact Regulatory Services.</p>
<p><b>Insects, wasps, flies, fruit flies, spiders, grubs</b></p> <p>Small grubs may be found in tomatoes and sweetcorn and are virtually undetectable in the growing plants and during processing. Insects that live naturally in fields may be harvested along with fruit and vegetables. Whilst food companies take steps to remove these insects, some will slip through the net. These insects and grubs are killed and sterilised by the canning process.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Contact the manufacturer.</p>
<p><b>Insects in jam</b></p> <p>These are usually wasps or fruit flies. These insects are naturally associated with fruit and fruit growing areas. As they are small and light, some will inevitably get past the inspection process.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Return to the retailer.</p>
<p><b>Mould</b></p> <p>Whilst moulds and yeasts are used in many food processes and are not harmful, but when found in food where it is not expected this is unacceptable. Usually it will have occurred due to damage of the individual container, though it could indicate an error in production or poor handling along the distribution chain; it is not usually possible to establish where damage has occurred.</p> <p>Cartons of juice and food may become damaged after production creating small holes that allows air in causing mould to grow. In juice this can look like a mass of cotton wool.</p> <p>When some people realise they have eaten mouldy food, they may vomit. This is not a result of poisoning; it is a response to something regarded as very unpleasant.</p>	<p>Do not consume affected food. Whilst food moulds are not a health risk, there may be other issues.</p> <p>Check that the product is in date and that you have followed the storage instructions. If it is out of date or not stored correctly there is nothing else to be done beyond binning it.</p> <p>If there is obvious damage to the container – contact the retailer.</p> <p>If there is no obvious damage to the container contact Regulatory Services.</p>





CONCERN	ACTION
<p><b>Nuts, bolts, wood, wire</b></p> <p>The presence these types of contaminant may indicate a failure in the food production process. However, if your complaint relates to glass in food or to a metal turning in canned food, before reporting the matter you should consider that most modern factories do not have glass in the production areas – it has most probably originated at home. Similarly metal turnings in canned food are most likely to have been produced when using a home can-opener.</p>	<p>There is a public health risk.</p> <p>If you are confident the material has not originated at home, contact Regulatory Services.</p>
<p><b>Stones</b></p> <p>Typically found in canned peas. During harvesting, sometimes small stones can be accidentally collected too. Stones of certain size, weight and appearance can be missed during the sorting process. As long as the manufacturer can show that all reasonable precautions were taken to try to stop this from happening, it is accepted that a number of these complaints will occur.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Contact the manufacturer.</p>
<p><b>White spots in tinned grapefruit</b></p> <p>Sometimes, tinned grapefruit will be covered in white specks that look like mould. Also the liquid in the tin may be cloudy. This is a natural constituent of the grapefruit called "Naringin" and it gives the fruit its distinctive bitter taste. Variations in the weather cause an increase in the amount; when canned, excess Naringin crystallizes out.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Contact the manufacturer.</p>
<p><b>Rice</b></p>	
<p><b>Maggots</b></p> <p>Cooked rice can look rather like maggots with a ridged appearance. Maggots have a flat end with two tiny eyes and reduce to a point at the other end; rice has similar shaped rounded ends. Cut the suspect item lengthwise to check, rice will have an even texture throughout.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk if cooked maggots are eaten. However, maggots in rice are not acceptable and may indicate a production fault - contact Regulatory services.</p>
<p><b>Vegetables &amp; Fruit</b></p>	
<p><b>Fibres / Hairs</b></p> <p>Food containing mushrooms and food containing sweetcorn may be found to have what appears to be hair in it. In both cases these are usually natural fibres associated with the growing product and are not harmful.</p> <p>If fresh mushroom is not cleaned properly, compost fibres may still be adhering to it that are then found in the cooked product and may be mistaken for a clump of hair.</p> <p>A quick test for hair is to burn a portion in a gas flame; singed hair has a distinctive smell.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Clean the food, prepare and eat as usual.</p> <p>If you are sure it is hair, and the product came canned or in a sealed packet – contact the manufacture.</p> <p>If you are sure it is a hair and the food was freshly prepared for sale – contact Regulatory Services.</p>
<p><b>Soil, slugs, stones, greenfly and fruit fly</b></p> <p>The presence of such items in fresh food is to be expected.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk.</p> <p>Clean the food thoroughly, prepare and eat as usual.</p>
<p><b>Tropical Spiders</b></p> <p>Sometimes, spiders can come to Britain in fruit, vegetables and other products grown in tropical and subtropical countries. Most are harmless but large ones can deliver a painful bite if carelessly handled.</p>	<p>If you are bitten contact a doctor. If possible capture the spider for identification.</p>



CONCERN	ACTION
<b>Wine</b>	
<p><b>Crystals</b> Tartrate crystals, also known as "wine diamonds" are a natural product of the wine, and form when the wine gets too cold. These are commonly lens or prism shaped, but other forms including needle shaped crystals can occur.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk. Sift the crystals out of the wine before consuming. If you believe that it is glass, please contact Regulatory Services.</p>
<p><b>Corked Wine</b> In bottles sealed with a natural cork, occasionally the cork is diseased and this will affect the taste of the wine. This disease is not harmful and is called "Trichlorinanisole" (TCA); it is extremely difficult to detect during manufacture and bottling.</p>	<p>There is no public health risk. Contact the supplier or manufacture.</p>
<b>Use-By Dates, Best Before Dates</b>	
<p><b>Use-by date.</b> Food must not be offered for sale beyond its Use-by-date.</p> <p><b>Best-before-date</b> – this is advisory. After the expiry of the best-before-date the quality of the product is expected to decline, but this is not a public health risk.</p> <p>If the food long past its best-before date and has suffered significant physical deterioration, this might indicate a problem in the supply and distribution of the product.</p>	<p>Always check food before purchase. If you spot food on sale beyond its use-by date, there is a possible health risk. Tell the retailer and notify Regulatory Services.</p> <p>If you discover it after you have made the purchase, keep the receipt for evidence.</p> <p>It is your choice whether or not to buy a product after the expiry of the best-before date. We will not normally investigate complaints about food past its best before date. However, if the food is in particularly poor condition, please notify Regulatory Services.</p>
<b>Suspected Food Poisoning</b>	
<p>You must contact your GP practice and arrange to give a poo sample as soon as possible. If the sample contains food poisoning bacteria we will be notified by the testing laboratory through Public Health England.</p> <p>If you think you have got food poisoning from a meal prepared by a food business please contact Regulatory Services. We can only investigate alleged food poisoning reports when we have the full cooperation of those making the allegation.</p> <p>In the case of isolated incidents, (that is reports that do not appear to be part of an outbreak). You will be contacted to obtain details about your illness; to confirm that you have provided a sample through your GP; you will be asked to complete a food history questionnaire. If you have any suspect food left over the investigating officer may collect it.</p> <p>When investigating reports of infectious disease, the Council's officers work in cooperation with Public Health England and under the direction of the NHS Regional Consultant in Communicable Disease Control.</p> <p>We cannot investigate anonymous reports and unsubstantiated reports.</p>	<p>There is a natural and mistaken tendency to blame food poisoning on the last meal eaten. Knowing this, before a suspect business is visited we look for evidence of other cases who are not connected with each other but have the same business in common.</p> <p>The two most common causes of food-poisoning like symptoms in Britain are from:</p> <p><i>Campylobacter</i> – This is the most common cause of food poisoning, but despite over 30 years of study there is a lot that is still unknown about it; one reason for this is its' long incubation period that makes it hard to identify the source of infection. Usually it has a 2 to 4 day incubation period between when infected food is eaten and symptoms start. However, the range is 1 to 10 days.</p> <p><i>Viral gastro-enteritis</i> – this is caused by a number of different types of virus. They are rarely food borne and are most likely to be picked up from surfaces contaminated by an infected person. Projectile vomiting is one indicator of this infection, usually occurring suddenly and with none or limited warning symptoms.</p>

