

North Norfolk District Council

Environmental Health

Commercial Team

Sampling Policy
for the Microbiological
Examination of Food
June 2011



1. Introduction – What is food sampling?

It is taking food samples for examination in a laboratory to see if certain bacteria are present.

It is an important part of the protection of the public health and food law enforcement functions of North Norfolk District Council. It is used to help gather information about microbiological quality, and possible presence of harmful bacteria in foods, which are produced and/or sold/used locally. The information is used to take appropriate action to protect the consumer.

This policy sets out the council's general approach to food sampling and to specific situations. The policy and sampling programme have been prepared in consultation with the food examiner via the local food liaison group as required by Food Law Code of Practice and Practice Guidance.

The sampling policy and programme have been prepared with regard to the guidance provided in the Food Law Code of Practice and LACORS Guidance on Food Sampling for Microbiological Examination (January 2006). North Norfolk will provide resources sufficient to carry out its sampling programme.

2. Why do we take food samples?

- To help evaluate hygiene practices at food premises
- To give advice and guidance to food businesses proprietors
- To assess the microbiological quality of food manufactured, distributed or sold in North Norfolk's area
- To monitor shellfish production areas against legal standards
- To support local businesses by helping them comply with the sampling requirements of food law
- To identify foods that may pose a hazard because they contain significant levels of pathogenic bacteria and/or associated toxins
- To identify contraventions of food law
- To help decide whether advice or enforcement action would be appropriate where it is suspected that poor practices and procedures exist
- To assess the microbiological quality of imported food
- To protect the consumer

3. General

Officers carrying out sampling will be qualified and trained in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice.

Our samples will be examined by the HPA Microbiology Services, Food, Water & Environmental Microbiology Laboratory, London, 61 Colindale Avenue London NW9 5EQ. This laboratory is UKAS accredited for microbiological tests on foodstuffs.

4. Informal samples

These are taken for the reasons noted above and cannot be used as evidence if legal action under food law needs to be taken.

4.1 Sampling programme

This authority will prepare a documented annual sampling programme having regard to the reasons listed above. This programme will consist of some, or all, of the following:

- Food from local approved premises, such as crab and shellfish processors and dairy products manufacturers.
- Eastern Region Survey Sampling Programme. This locally organised programme focuses on issues of importance to Norfolk Food Authorities.
- Shellfish and seawater sampling.
- LACORS Co-ordinated Food Liaison Group Sampling Programme. This nationally organised programme requires sampling of food from a variety of premises.
- Sampling of high risk food from businesses in North Norfolk.
- Other National and EU programmes. From time to time, we are invited to participate in special surveys co-ordinated by the Food Standards Agency and the European Union.

Premises taking part in ongoing regular sampling will be informed annually, in advance, of their involvement and responsibilities in the programme.

4.2 Other informal samples

Sampling may also take place:

- as a result of a food complaint or suspected food poisoning outbreak;
- to assist food businesses where particular problems arise;
- by officers when there is any need to check the safety of food.

5. Formal samples

These are taken for examination so that legal action under food law can be taken if appropriate.

They will be taken where food is found to be, or is suspected to be, unsafe. Guidance is obtained from the laboratory to make sure formal samples are taken properly.

6. Sampling procedures

Sampling will take place in accordance with North Norfolk's sampling procedures.

The officers will identify themselves on arrival at a food business, explain the reason for requesting a sample, and offer to pay for it. Sometimes a survey requires a food sample to be taken anonymously. In these cases the officer will identify themselves afterwards.

7. Follow-up

We will inform businesses of the results of food samples as follows:

- When the examination results are received the inspecting officer will decide appropriate follow-up action with the Commercial Team Leader and expert advice of the food examiner.
- North Norfolk's enforcement policy, and any liaison with the Home or Originating Authority, will be considered as appropriate.

Sampling results will be categorised by the laboratory as being satisfactory, acceptable, unsatisfactory or potentially hazardous. Follow-up action will be taken as follows:

- **Letters and advice:** The proprietor will be notified of the results in writing. Where necessary, advice will be given on possible causes of problems and improvements that could be made. Advisory literature may be sent. Advisory visits may be made.
- **Re-samples:** Re-samples will be taken after unsatisfactory results. Re-samples will normally be carried out within 2 weeks of the original sample.
- **Unsatisfactory or Potentially hazardous results:** The proprietor will be notified of the results by phone. We will consider taking formal samples. Where a follow-up visit reveals poor practice or compliance, North Norfolk's Enforcement Policy will be followed.

If an arrangement exists for Home and Originating Authority referrals, those authorities will be notified of unsatisfactory results. Information will be provided on the selection and methodology of the samples, where requested, to enable manufacturers or importers to assess the result or repeat the examination.

8. Complaints and Appeal

Any person not satisfied with any aspect of the service they have received or who want appeal against any decisions that affect them should initially contact The Commercial Team at the address below.

9. Review

This Sampling Policy will be reviewed annually and amended as necessary.

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