



CITY OF CAPE TOWN  
ISIXEKO SASEKAPA  
STAD KAAPSTAD

# **THE CITY'S RESPONSE TO FOOD SAFETY MATTERS**

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

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## THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS

<b>Q</b>	<b>What are Environmental Health Practitioners?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Environmental Health Practitioners are professional officers responsible for monitoring and managing all areas where the environment and public health intersect, including health promotion, education and awareness, and acting to ensure compliance with relevant legislation.</p> <p>Some key responsibilities include food and water quality; monitoring for incidents of waterborne and foodborne diseases; vector management, including rodent baiting and participating in multi-sectoral inspections to clamp down on the sale of illegal pesticides; monitoring air quality; infectious disease management and other health challenges such as air pollution.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>How many Environmental Practitioners does the City of Cape Town employ?</b>
<b>A</b>	The City of Cape Town employs 209 Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs).
<b>Q</b>	<b>How often do Environmental Health Practitioners inspect food premises?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Environmental Health Practitioners are mandated to conduct visits to business premises at least twice a year, but if problems are identified or complaints are received, additional inspections are carried out until the problem is resolved.</p> <p>All businesses, including spaza shops, are bound by the following regulations/legislation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health Act and Food Regulations</li> <li>• The Business Act (for the sale of prepared foods/takeaways)</li> <li>• Zoning scheme</li> <li>• Building regulations</li> <li>• Fire safety legislation</li> <li>• The Tobacco Control Act.</li> </ul> <p>Environmental Health Practitioners inspect for compliance with the legislative requirements.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>What proof do we have that Environmental Health Practitioners are doing their jobs?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Between July 2023 and May 2024, the City's EHPs conducted over 25 000 inspections at food handling premises and took 4 605 food samples for microbiological analysis.</p> <p>During the period, the City's Food Laboratory conducted nearly 17 000 analyses on a variety of foodstuffs and dairy products, testing for compliance with relevant food standards.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>How can I get hold of my nearest Environmental Health office or practitioner?</b>
<b>A</b>	Members of the public who have health-related concerns or complaints about businesses can contact their local Environmental Health Office for assistance via their local clinic or the City's Technical Operations Centre on 0860 103 089. Alternatively, they can log a service request via the City's e-services portal – category – food safety under Health

## UNDERSTANDING FOOD SAFETY REGULATIONS

<b>Q</b>	<b>What is a Certificate of Acceptability?</b>
<b>A</b>	A Certificate Of Acceptability (COA) is a legal document indicating that a food-handling establishment complies with the hygiene and food safety standards as outlined in the Regulations governing the general hygiene requirements for food premises, the transport of food and related matters, R638 of 22 June 2018.
<b>Q</b>	<b>Do spaza shops need COAs?</b>
<b>A</b>	Yes, they do. Any business that handles foodstuff is required to have a COA.
<b>Q</b>	<b>How does one go about obtaining a COA?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>In July 2024, City Health piloted its online COA application process. Paper-based submissions are still valid, but the public is advised that the online system is up and running, and very quick to complete.  <a href="https://bit.ly/3UY10sf">https://bit.ly/3UY10sf</a></p> <p>COAs are awarded ONLY on submission of all relevant documentation, and a physical inspection to ensure that the premises comply with legislative requirements.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>What does the law say about expired food?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>In terms of South African Labelling Regulations, there is no such thing as 'expired food'. The regulations do however dictate that all foodstuff have a clearly indicated date marking on the label. The only exceptions are unprocessed, unpacked fresh fruits/vegetables/fish/meat products and products that by nature do not spoil, such as vinegar.</p> <p>Generally, the date markings that consumers will be familiar with are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Best Before', which generally applies to foods that do not require refrigeration (canned goods, rice, pasta, cereal, biscuits etc.)</li> <li>• 'Sell By', which is the date by which it should leave the store, but will still be safe for a reasonable period of time after</li> <li>• 'Use By', which is the most critical, and generally applies to meat, dairy or any other product that requires refrigeration.</li> </ul> <p>Also important is that, with regard to shelf stable goods, i.e. items that do not require refrigeration, food items could still be safe to use, but the nutritional value may diminish after the sell-by date.</p> <p>Perishables and cold chain goods should not be sold past the use-by dates. Store owners are encouraged to practice stock rotation to avoid having to discard perishable items that are nearing their use by dates. (i.e. first in, first out)</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>So why do so many shops sell food that is clearly beyond the best before dates?</b>
<b>A</b>	The labelling regulations do not prohibit the sale of food beyond the dates on the labels, but act as a guide for consumers to make informed choices. However, it is illegal to remove or tamper with dates on products, and then sell them. Equally important to note, if stored correctly, most items that have past their best before dates are still perfectly fine to consume, apart from having lost some of its nutritional value.

<b>Q</b>	<b>What can I do to protect my family and my finances with the food I buy?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Always check the dates on your food products before purchasing – it is illegal to change or remove any date mark on food packaging.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always follow the instructions found on the label, i.e. store in a cool, dry place; refrigerate after opening; once opened use within three days etc.</li> <li>• Except for fresh unprocessed fruits, vegetables, meat, unpackaged fish and ready-to-eat foodstuffs, the South African Labelling Regulations requires that all food products be labelled in English, and where possible, a second official language.</li> <li>• Check the packaging of food products. Do not buy canned food products that are bulging, rusted, dented or damaged.</li> <li>• Always use your senses (sight, smell, touch) - If in doubt, do not buy the product.</li> </ul>
<b>Q</b>	<b>Why are so many children getting sick from eating chips and sweets bought at spaza shops?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>The national Health Department's investigations found traces of organophosphates, commonly found in illegal pesticides, in a number of the incidents that have occurred.</p> <p>There is no clear indication of how the cross-contamination occurred, but there are a number of possibilities – possibly, trace amounts of these chemicals used for pest control purposes somehow found its way onto or into packaging, or onto the hands of children from their environment. It is unfortunate that the focus has been solely on spaza shops, when the real issue is the use and management of illegal pesticides.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>Why are adults not as badly affected, or at all?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>It is likely that the trace amounts of chemicals are/were too small to have any significant impact on adults, due to their size. By comparison, children breathe, drink and eat more per kilogram of body weight than adults, resulting in greater exposures per kilogram of body weight to any contaminants in the air, water, or food.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>How do I protect my children?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Without knowing the source of contact with illegal pesticides, it is incredibly difficult. However, some potential things to consider would be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching them to buy only sealed products and not products that have been repackaged</li> <li>• Buying chips and sweets for them, and cleaning the packaging or decanting the products into a bowl for consumption</li> <li>• Teaching them to wash their hands regularly – especially before eating - even if they are only eating a sweet or packet of chips</li> <li>• Not using illegal pesticides in the home</li> <li>• Making sure that hand hygiene and food safety are top of mind at all times for the entire household</li> </ul>

## VECTOR MANAGEMENT AND ILLEGAL PESTICIDES

<b>Q</b>	<b>What qualifies as illegal pesticides?</b>
<b>A</b>	Legal pesticides (label is marked with an L) are registered for use under Act 36 of 1947. Illegal pesticides are ones that are NOT registered, OR, pesticides that are legally registered for agricultural uses, but decanted into unlabelled domestic containers like juice or medicine bottles, for household use.
<b>Q</b>	<b>What are some examples of illegal pesticides?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Some of the most common and dangerous substances include Two Step, liquid poison mixtures, Green Leaf sachets for cockroaches and flies, Aldicarb, slug granules and insecticide chalk sticks.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">   </div>
<b>Q</b>	<b>These illegal pesticides work really well, and they are cheap. How else am I supposed to manage rats, mice, cockroaches and flies?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p><b>To deter pests in your home or community:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Store food in secure containers</li> <li>• Clean food preparation areas immediately after use</li> <li>• Make sure rubbish bins are securely closed</li> <li>• Do not dump waste illegally</li> <li>• Do not leave uneaten pet food out</li> <li>• Seal cracks or holes in walls, floors and under doors and encourage your neighbours to do the same.</li> </ul> <p>If you do have an infestation, use registered pesticides only, but even then, use extreme caution, especially around young children and pets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Store all household chemicals in a lockable cupboard out of children's reach.</li> <li>• Keep pesticides in its original packaging for instructions in case of accidental exposure/ingestion.</li> <li>• Educate the entire household, and children in particular, about the dangers of pesticides</li> <li>• Make sure everyone knows the Poisons Information Hotline number</li> <li>• Do not decant chemicals into cooldrink bottles</li> <li>• Dispose of empty packaging as directed, to avoid accidental contamination of the environment</li> <li>• Follow instructions for use on pesticide or chemical packaging. Use gloves if required.</li> <li>• Use the right chemical for the required purpose and avoid bulk buying.</li> <li>• Read the label carefully and follow instructions closely.</li> </ul>
<b>Q</b>	<b>How do people get sick from illegal pesticides?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Exposure to illegal pesticides can happen in a number of ways, either through direct skin contact with the substance, or ingesting it, or the pesticides contaminating other surfaces/materials or foodstuff, which are then touched or consumed by a person.</p> <p>The City's Environmental Health Practitioners are dispatched to investigate such cases, to determine the cause, extent of the contamination/contact, and what remedial measures are required.</p>

<b>Q</b>	<b>What do I do if someone has been exposed to a poisonous substance/chemical?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Do not give them milk or try to force them to vomit. Instead, rinse their mouth with water; wash the exposed skin, and rinse the eyes with clean water.</p> <p>The Poisons Information Hotline is available 24/7 on 0861 555 777.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>What assistance does the City provide to manage rodents and other pests?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Environmental Health Practitioners service, on average, 85 000 block-baiting stations in public spaces and informal areas across the metropole annually. The use of properly secured locked bait-boxes to dispense pesticide is the most widely accepted method of pest control across the world as it minimises risk to non-target species. These bait boxes are monitored on a regular basis, and the frequency of service will depend on the rodent activity prevalent in the area.</p> <p>EHPs also monitor for illegal waste accumulation and work closely with relevant departments to clear illegal dumping or other potential health and safety risks in communities.</p> <p>If you have a rodent problem, or you want to report any concerns or tip-offs about the sale of illegal pesticides, contact your local clinic or nearest Environmental Health office, or contact the City's call centre on 0860 103 089.</p>

## FOOD SAFETY IN THE HOME

<b>Q</b>	<b>What is food poisoning?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Food poisoning is a common illness caused by more than 250 food-borne organisms such as bacteria. If not prepared or stored properly, food can be exposed to, or become contaminated with organisms like bacteria or mould. Some bacteria causes food poisoning and can make us very ill. In some severe cases, food poisoning can be fatal. Food allergies can also make people very ill and can be fatal.</p> <p>Common types of bacteria include Salmonella, Staphylococcus aureus, E.coli, Bacillus cereus, Clostridium perfringens, Listeria, Campylobacter and Shigella.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>What are the causes of food poisoning?</b>
<b>A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• food that is prepared on dirty surfaces or with unclean equipment;</li> <li>• cooked and uncooked foods that are stored together – this can cause cross contamination;</li> <li>• exposing food to dirty hands;</li> <li>• food that is not stored properly (e.g. undercooked meat or poultry kept at room temperature after cooking);</li> <li>• not washing your hands after using the toilet or changing nappies and then preparing food,</li> <li>• eating food contaminated with bacteria;</li> <li>• drinking contaminated water; and</li> <li>• drinking unpasteurised milk.</li> </ul>
<b>Q</b>	<b>What are common symptoms of food poisoning?</b>
<b>A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stomach and muscle cramps</li> <li>• Runny tummy</li> <li>• Nausea and vomiting</li> <li>• Appetite loss</li> <li>• Fever</li> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Headache or migraine</li> </ul>
<b>Q</b>	<b>What are food allergies?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Common food allergies include peanuts, tree nuts, milk, wheat, eggs, crustaceans, molluscs, fish and soya beans. Depending on the allergy, symptoms usually happen immediately or within a few hours of eating.</p> <p>Certain food allergies are especially dangerous. By example, tree nuts and peanuts can trigger anaphylaxis – this is a flood of chemicals from your immune system that puts your body into a state of shock; you will need to be treated at a clinic or hospital immediately.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>What are common symptoms of food allergies?</b>
<b>A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Light-headedness</li> <li>• Abdominal cramps</li> <li>• Nausea/vomiting</li> <li>• Swelling in the lips, eyelids, face or tongue</li> <li>• Diarrhoea</li> <li>• Congestion and/or a runny nose</li> </ul>

<b>Q</b>	<b>How can I prevent food-borne illnesses?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Read your food label. Most labels include a list of allergens along with warnings for those who might be allergic. Simple things like washing your hands after going to the toilet, cooking meat properly or washing all fruit and vegetables before eating them can help protect you and your family from food-borne illnesses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wash your hands often and thoroughly, especially after using the toilet and whilst preparing food.</li><li>• Wash fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly with clean water.</li><li>• Make sure to cook your food properly, especially meat, pork and chicken.</li><li>• Keep raw meat separate from cooked meat and do not use the same cutting board without cleaning it first.</li><li>• Serve food dishes as soon as they are cooked, or cool them rapidly until serving time. It is best to serve hot food at a temperature above 65°C. Avoid cooked food that has been standing at room temperature for some time.</li><li>• Quickly refrigerate leftovers. The ideal temperature to store foodstuffs in the refrigerator is below 5°C.</li><li>• If you are going to reheat food, do this quickly and thoroughly.</li><li>• drink pasteurised milk and milk products.</li><li>• Make sure that an approved abattoir slaughtered your meat. Meat from informal traders may be cheaper, but it can put your health at risk as this meat is not inspected post slaughtering.</li></ul>