



Food Safety and Doggy Bags

Many restaurants writing Food Safety Programs (FSP's) may be assessing the potential risks from giving customers doggy bags for food not consumed in the restaurant.

The term *doggy bag* developed when food left uneaten at a restaurant was taken home for the family pet. Today, many customers will consume that food themselves, but at a later time. Most customers would be unaware that the safety of uneaten food taken away has been compromised and should they suffer from a food borne illness, they may hold the restaurateur liable.

The food purchased by a customer at a restaurant becomes the property of that customer. It may be seen as poor customer service if a restaurateur bans doggy bags. However, in the interests of public health, the practice of taking away uneaten food from a restaurant in doggy bags for human consumption **should be discouraged**.

Risks of doggy bags

Doggy bags differ from normal takeaway foods, because takeaway foods are intended to be eaten away from the premises and are served in a takeaway container by the food business at the appropriate temperature, that is: hot foods are served hot- at 60°C or higher or cold foods- at 5°C or lower.

Food for doggy bags can be exposed to from the following hazards:

- Temperature abuse (time in the Temperature Danger Zone of between 5°C and 60°C)
- Handling by consumer (contamination with *Staphylococcus aureus* which can produce staphylococcal enterotoxins which are heat stable and cause food-borne illness)
- Contamination with other food-borne pathogens such as *Salmonella spp*
- Cross contamination between cooked and uncooked foods.

Possible Solutions

If a customer insists on a doggy bag, there are some ways in which risks can be minimised:

- Have a procedure in your Food Safety Program for dealing with doggy bags
- Only give doggy bags for food which are suitable (low-risk)
- Transfer food into a new, food-grade container
- Have an instruction sticker or leaflet which explains the risks and sets suitable storage and reheating conditions for the food.

Continued on back...

- Write the date and, if you have time, put a code on the container and in an appropriate record book. (Recording this information may be helpful in the case of a consumer taking legal action against a proprietor for selling unsafe food. The records demonstrate responsible actions were taken on the part of the proprietor.)

Example Sticker for Doggy Bag Container

BUSINESS NAME
Take Away Food/Doggy Bag
WARNING

We hope you enjoyed your meal.

Food taken away from our premises needs to be responsibly managed to ensure product safety. We want to keep your custom so in the interests of public health:

- Please place this food in your refrigerator as soon as possible
- Either reheat the food the following day to piping hot, or discard.
- Avoid leaving this food unrefrigerated (that is- within the Temperature Danger Zone of between 5°C and 60°C) for more than a cumulative total of 4 hours - this includes the time the food was in the restaurant.

Date Sold.....