



**NEWS FROM . . .  
THE KINGS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT -  
DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

**WHAT NOT TO EAT**

The most frequent question that health inspectors are asked by the general public is “where is it safe to eat?” Unfortunately, there is no simple answer to that question. There is, however, one question that can be answered and the answer should encourage members of the public to think twice about the foods that they purchase. The question is “*which foods are **NOT** safe to eat?*”

These days it's not unusual to encounter food vendors off the side of the road on our way to work or at the parking lot of the local grocery store. Some of us have even gotten a knock on the door of our home from vendors that were selling raw meats, fish, tamales, burritos and even homemade ice cream. If you were unaware of the potential health risks involved, you might have even bought and sampled some of the menu items. What you may not know, is that even though the foods may appear safe and some may even taste delicious - they are **NOT** safe to eat!

Under the California Retail Food Code or more commonly known as the food law, all food operators are required to obtain a food vending permit before they can sell any food product to the public. Permitted roadside vendors are also required to limit their food vending operation to foods that are pre-packaged or whole foods that require no preparation (e.g. cutting or cooking) such as whole fruits or vegetables. Foods that are considered potentially hazardous such as meats and dairy products can not be sold off the road or door to door if the operator does not have the means to properly maintain these foods safe. Facilities that serve potentially hazardous foods to the public must also employ individual(s) with food safety certification that can demonstrate that they know how to handle and manage foods safely. In addition, vendors also have to comply with all county and city ordinances in order to sell food products within the county or city limits.

So what makes certain foods unsafe to eat? There are numerous ways of mishandling foods during their preparation which can make them unsafe for public consumption. Using dirty cooking equipment, lack of temperature control and monitoring, improper reheating or hot-holding, lack of refrigeration, improper cold-holding, improper thawing, improper transportation, no hand washing facilities, and no access to restrooms are some of the ways that can lead to the mishandling and contamination of foods. Food operators with poor hygiene or those who are ill are also more likely to cross-contaminate the food products that they prepare. In Kings County, staff from Environmental Health Services are in charge of conducting routine inspections for all the permitted food facilities including roadside and door to door food vendors. This is done to ensure that the foods that permitted food operators are preparing are safe for public consumption. The inspection reports become public record and members of the public can request to view a copy of the most recent inspection report for any permitted facility.

When an illegal food vendor is found to be out of compliance with the requirements outlined above and the foods are suspected of being contaminated due to their preparation or handling practices, the food items must be destroyed. The Environmental Health Staff strongly encourage members of the public **NOT** to purchase foods from illegal roadside or door to door vendors in order to protect their own health and safety.

Take a closer look!

- ❖ **The foods sold by illegal food vendors are typically prepared in private homes or other unapproved facilities.**



- ❖ Unapproved facilities are not inspected by the local Environmental Health Staff
- ❖ Prepared foods have to be cooked, cut or prepared in clean equipment and over clean surfaces that have been disinfected with a sanitizing solution to prevent cross-contamination.
  
- ❖ **Foods are often transported for hours in the trunk of a car without regard to temperature controls.**



- ❖ Prepared foods have to be maintained hot – at or above 135°F OR cold - at or below 41°F in order to prevent bacterial contamination and/or growth.

- ❖ **Roadside vendors handle the foods with their bare hands and they don't have access to restrooms or handwashing facilities, and they are often in remote and isolated areas of the county without transportation.**



- ❖ Fecal matter can contaminate the food through dirty hands.
- ❖ Food items have to be displayed in a manner that reduces their exposure to ambient contaminants such as dust and debris.

- ❖ **The risk for contracting a food borne-illness (FBI) can range from low to high depending on the food items that people eat and their ability to fight infection.**

Children, the elderly and people with compromised immunity are at greater risk for contracting a food-borne illness.

<b>FOODS NOT TO EAT</b>	<b>PREPARED</b>	<b>SOLD</b>	<b>FBI RISK</b>
Candied apples	Private home	Roadside Stands	Low
Fruit cocktails	Private home / van	Roadside Stands	High
Seafood cocktails	Private home	Store parking lot/ door to door	High
Tacos, Tamales	Private home	Store parking lot/ door to door	High
Menudo, Pozole	Private home	Store parking lot/ door to door	High
Cheese	Private home (bathtub)	Store parking lot/ door to door	High
Breads	Private home	Door to door	Low
Cotton candy	Private home	Door to door	Low
Ice cream	Private home	Door to door	High

Contact the Kings County Environmental Health Services at (559) 584-1411 if you have any questions regarding this information or visit the website at [www.countyofkings.com/health/ehs](http://www.countyofkings.com/health/ehs).