

# Food grade packaging

Because packaging and containers used to store food are in direct contact with the food, they need to be suitable and 'food grade'. If the packaging is made from inappropriate materials there is potential for it to make food unsafe or unsuitable.

## Suitable for intended use

The Food Standards Code details specific requirements for surfaces in contact with foods, including containers and packaging in which food is processed or stored. They must be:

- adequate for the production of safe and suitable food, and
- fit for their intended use.

For a food contact surface to be considered food grade it must be able to be effectively cleaned, and must be made from a material that will not migrate into, contaminate or taint the food. The requirements for a plastic to be considered food grade are listed in the Australian Standard for Plastics materials for food contact use (AS2070-1999). This Standard applies to manufacturers of plastics materials for food contact and specifies procedures to be used during the various stages of production. The requirements apply to such items as packages, domestic containers, wrapping materials, utensils or any other plastics items intended to come into contact with food.

The Food Standards Code also specifies the maximum allowable levels in foods for certain compounds commonly used in making food packaging (eg tin in canned foods, acrylonitrile and vinyl chloride — used in the production of plastics — in any food).

The US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) maintains a database listing the approved food contact substances that have been demonstrated to be safe for their intended use.

## Can be effectively cleaned

Any surface that comes into contact with food must be able to be easily and effectively cleaned and, where necessary, sanitised.

Any container or packaging used to store food should be smooth, and free of cracks, chips, crevices, ridges or grooves that could harbour bacteria and hinder attempts to easily and effectively clean it. Any defects in a food contact surface can allow the build-up of food scraps, and harbour bacteria which can contaminate the food.

A food business must ensure that any food container or packaging they use is designed and constructed

to withstand the effects of detergents, hot water and sanitising chemicals.

Cardboard or wood containers used as fruit and vegetable packaging should not be used for unpackaged ready-to-eat foods because these containers cannot be cleaned and sanitised effectively.

## Made from suitable materials

Food contact surfaces must be made of material that will not contaminate food and are impervious to grease, food particles and water.

Containers and packaging must be made from materials that will not contaminate food by allowing chemicals to migrate from the packaging into the food, or by giving the food an unacceptable taste or odour.

The material used in food packaging must be able to withstand the uses it would normally be exposed to, such as use in the microwave, used to store hot food, and used to store food in the freezer.

Some materials are not suitable for use with acidic foods. Examples include:

- lead in ceramic, china and crystal utensils, solders, flux and pewter
- galvanised metal
- copper and copper alloys, and
- unglazed earthenware is unsuitable for eating and drinking utensils.

## Reuse of containers

Containers that have been used as packaging for one food must not be reused unless they can be properly cleaned and, if necessary, sanitised to prevent cross contamination.

Some food grade containers, such as ice cream containers, may be suitable for reuse, however the number of times these containers can be safely reused is limited by how well they retain their properties after being washed in hot water and detergent. With constant reuse the containers may become brittle and break. This increases the risk of the container breaking and contaminating the food. Brittle containers are not considered suitable, and should be discarded.

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Where jars and lids are reused, they should be:

- inspected prior to use (and reuse) and discarded if they have damaged seals, or are cracked or soiled with anything likely to taint or contaminate food (eg any non-food chemicals)
- thoroughly cleaned so that no residue is left on the jars and lids (a dedicated automatic glassware washer would be ideal, but careful washing by hand may also be effective).
- thoroughly sanitised (this might not be required if the food products are to be hot-filled at 85°C).

Containers and packaging made specifically for food contact use are recommended because they are made from suitable materials tested for contact with food, and are usually designed for easier cleaning and sanitising.

### **About the NSW Food Authority**

The NSW Food Authority is the government organisation that helps ensure NSW food is safe and correctly labelled.

It works with consumers, industry and other government organisations to minimise food poisoning by providing information about and regulating the safe production, storage, transport, promotion and preparation of food.

### **More information**

- visit the NSW Food Authority's website at [www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au)
- phone the helpline on 1300 552 406

### **Note**

This information is a general summary and cannot cover all situations. Food businesses are required to comply with all of the provisions of the Food Standards Code and the Food Act 2003 (NSW).