

Food Establishment Best Practices for Providing Consumer Purchase Information for a Foodborne Illness Investigation

Background

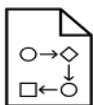
Rapid and effective information sharing between the food industry and government officials helps to solve foodborne outbreaks and may prevent additional illnesses. Public health officials at the local, state, and federal level may request consumer food purchase data to investigate foodborne illness/outbreaks. This information is used to identify the food in common between ill people which may determine what made them sick. As the process to identify which ill people are part of an outbreak may take several weeks, this leads to incomplete food history recall by the ill person. Investigators request consumer purchase information from food establishments after they obtain details about the food purchased during the public health interview. This helps to bridge these gaps in food history. This information may also be used to trace the product through the supply chain to determine when and where it was produced which may lead to a faster removal of a contaminated food from sale. The time frame and scope of the request will vary based on several factors, including the shelf life of the product.

For more information about how food purchase history information is used to investigate outbreaks please visit <https://www.afdo.org/resources/purchase-history/>.

Best Practices



Work closely with public health officials to assist with the investigation. It is important to establish relationships prior to an investigation.



Develop a written process for how information will be shared during illness/outbreak investigations in coordination with your company's legal counsel and your state's public health and regulatory authorities. A plan that is developed in advance and communicated to staff will make the investigation go more smoothly.



Protect personally identifiable information (PII). Consumer information that directly identifies an individual beyond what has been provided by the public health or regulatory agency should be redacted. Purchases beyond food/grocery items (e.g., pharmacy, liquor, tobacco) may not be needed during a foodborne illness/outbreak investigation. Communicate with public health officials if you need clarity on what records are needed.



Send consumer purchase data to the requestor as soon as possible. Food establishments and public health officials should determine an agreed upon timeline and ensure that expectations are clear.



Capture traceability information (e.g., date of purchase, brand name, product description, product package size) at the point of sale.

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Share food purchase information in a format that is sortable, if feasible. Although not required, spreadsheets such as excel will help with sorting and filtering data.



Think outside the box and consider alternatives ways to obtain purchase information. If your company can obtain purchase data using methods such as all or part of a credit card number, work with investigators to obtain permission and sufficient details to identify the correct purchase information.