

CANNED FOODS: Keeping the lid on contamination

Commercial canning is one of the safest methods of food processing. In fact, canned foods have a much safer record than home-cooked meals. However, on occasion, a canned food may spoil due to a manufacturing flaw. Sometimes a can may be accidentally damaged in the store or at home and contamination and spoilage occur. For example, a grocery worker may accidentally puncture a can when cutting open cases of canned food or a can may be dropped. The seam beneath the label may be damaged which could go unnoticed.

How can you tell when a particular canned food may be unsafe to eat?

Here are some warning signs to look for both on the outside and inside of a can:

BEFORE BUYING a canned food at the grocery store, examine the outside of the can.

WARNING SIGNS:

- Severe dents
- Extensive rust or corrosion
- Bulging
- Leaking
- Stains



Do not buy cans with such signs but report them to the store manager. Generally, prompt action will be taken to remove them from sale. However, if you are still dissatisfied with the response, report the suspect product to the manufacturer. If you still feel dissatisfied, report it to the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit.

BEFORE OPENING a canned food, take a second look. Wrap-around labels may hide certain can defects. If on opening a can, the contents spurt out, **do not taste** food. Spurting may indicate bacterial contamination. Return product to store manager.

REMEMBER; always return canned food with its coded end lid. Numbers and letters are imprinted on can ends by manufacturers to help determine a product's history, such as which lot it came from,

when it was processed, etc. This information is vital in tracking down the source of a problem.

WHEN STORING canned food, keep in a cool, dry place. Stock should be used within a year to ensure best taste and nutritional quality. If you have a summer cottage, bring home unopened cans at the end of each season. Once opened, any leftover contents should be transferred to a food-grade container.

If canned foods are accidentally frozen throw them out. The change in temperature and expansion of contents caused by freezing may stress the metal and cause seam damage.

If a canned food is suspected of causing illness, seek medical attention and report the incident immediately to the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit. Refrigerate some of the suspect food, if possible, and keep the can and coded end since they are necessary in determining the cause of illness and possible recall of suspected lots.

Remember, if you are in doubt about a canned food, **DO NOT EAT IT**. Consult the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit for advice.

