

READ THE FOOD LABELS



Why is Food Labelling Indispensable?

With the protection of packaging material, prepackaged food may look clean and hygienic. However, it is difficult for consumers to ascertain the quality and composition of the food by its superficial appeal to the senses. For this reason, it is a prerequisite for prepackaged food to be wrapped in a proper package and to bear a true and legible label so that consumers could know the content of the food and make the right choice.

The Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations, a set of comprehensive regulatory legislation, require food manufacturers or packers to label their products in a prescribed, uniform and legible manner. Consumers may then benefit from the food label at the time of purchase.

What is on the Label?

Unless there is exemption on the Regulations or otherwise stated, the following information shall be marked in either English or Chinese language or in both languages on the label of prepackaged food:

(If Chinese and English languages are used in labelling, the food name and the ingredient list of the prepackaged food shall be labelled in both languages.)

1. Name of the Food

The food name shall be legibly marked and shall not be false, misleading or deceptive in any respect as to the nature of the food. It should also serve to make the nature and type of food known to consumers.

2. List of Ingredients

(I) The list of ingredients shall be preceded by an appropriate heading consisting of the words " ingredients ", " composition ", " contents " or words of similar meaning, with the ingredients listed in descending order of weight or volume determined as at the time of their use when the food was packaged.

(II) (a) If a food contains any substances which may cause allergy, including cereals containing gluten, crustacea, eggs, fish, peanuts, soyabeans, milk and tree nuts and their products, the name of the substance shall be specified in the list of ingredients.

- (b) If a food consists of or contains sulphite in a concentration of 10 parts per million or more, the functional class of the sulphite and its name shall be specified in the list of ingredients.
- (III) If a food contains a food additive, such additive shall be specified on the label by its functional class and its exact name or its identification number under the International Numbering System for Food Additives (INS) endorsed by the Codex Alimentarius Commission or its identification number under the INS with the prefix "E" or "e".

3. Indication of "use by" or "best before" Date

Use either the words " use by 此日期或之前食用 "or " best before 此日期前最佳 ", as the case may be, followed by the date up to which specific properties of the food can be retained, to indicate the shelf life of the food. For details of the date indication, please refer to the " Date Marking of Prepackaged Food " overleaf.

4. Statement of Special Conditions for Storage or Instructions for Use

If special conditions are required for the storage of a prepackaged food to retain its specific properties or special instructions are needed for the use of the prepackaged food, a statement shall be legibly marked on the label.

5. Name and Address of Manufacturer or Packer

The prepackaged food shall be legibly labelled with the full name and full address of the manufacturer or packer or otherwise in accordance with the requirements as stipulated in the Regulations.

6. Count, Weight or Volume of Food

The food label shall include the numerical count or net weight or net volume of the prepackaged food.

Date Marking of Prepackaged Food

The "use by" or "best before" date shall be shown either in Arabic numerals or in both English and Chinese languages.

| Category of Food | Words for Indication | Marking of Date in Arabic Numerals |
|--|---|---|
| (A) Prepackaged food which, from the microbiological point of view, is highly perishable and is therefore likely after a short period to constitute an immediate danger to human health. e.g. Pasteurized fresh milk, packed egg and ham sandwiches, etc. | <p>use by 此日期或之前食用</p> <p>If the "use by" date is shown in Arabic numerals, the day shall be indicated by the words "DD", "dd", "D", or "d" in English lettering and "日" in Chinese Character ; the month shall be indicated by the words "MM", "mm", "M", or "m" in English lettering and "月" in Chinese Character; and the year shall be indicated by the words "YY", "yy", "Y", or "y" in English lettering and "年" in Chinese Character, and the day, month and year can appear in any order.</p> | <p>DD MM 日 月 (e.g. 25 04 (i.e. 25 April))</p> <p>or</p> <p>DD MM YY 日 月 年 (e.g. 25 04 06 (i.e. 25 April 2006))</p> |
| | | <p>best before 此日期前最佳</p> <p>If the "best before" date is shown in Arabic numerals, the day shall be indicated by the words "DD", "dd", "D", or "d" in English lettering and "日" in Chinese Character ; the month shall be indicated by the words "MM", "mm", "M", or "m" in English lettering and "月" in Chinese Character; and the year shall be indicated by the words "YY", "yy", "Y", or "y" in English lettering and "年" in Chinese Character, and the day, month and year can appear in any order.</p> |
| (B) Prepackaged food not included in category (A) above. e.g. Candies, canned beverages, etc. | | |

Note

Under the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations, it is an offence to sell any food after its "use by" date. Furthermore, any person who, not being the food manufacturer or packer or without their written authorisation, alters, removes or obliterates any particulars on the label required under the Regulations also commits an offence.

This leaflet is for reference only. Any legal requirements on food labelling shall be referred to the said Regulations. For enquiries and complaints relating to labelling of food, please telephone the Food Surveillance and Complaint Section of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department.

Enquiries

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

24-hour Hotline: 2868 0000

Website: www.cfs.gov.hk

Communication Resource Unit: 2381 6096

E-mail: enquiries@fehd.gov.hk