

What to do if a patron alleges food poisoning

Food Act 2006

If a person contacts your food business to report or complain that they think your food made them sick, reassure the person that your business takes their complaint very seriously and that you need to write down some details so that the incident can be investigated properly.

Try not to become apologetic, defensive, or indicate to the person that your food may be at fault. The source of illness can only be determined by a proper investigation supported by laboratory tests.

Whether or not your business decides to compensate the complainant in any way, is completely a business management decision.

Suggested procedure

Upon receiving advice from a patron that they believe food from your business made them sick, the person receiving the advice should obtain and record the following details:

- time and date that the report or complaint was made
- name and contact details of the complainant
- the number of people that are allegedly ill
- date and time the food was eaten at your food business
- what food/s were eaten
- what food/s the person suspects caused the illness
- whether or not any suspected food remains in the possession of the complainant.

Note: The patron is not required to provide any of the above information. If they choose to answer the questions, you should treat all information in the strictest confidence.

After receiving information from a patron regarding alleged food poisoning, the employee should immediately inform the supervisor or proprietor of the food business, of the details of the incident.

The supervisor or proprietor should ascertain if any of the food suspected to have caused the illness remains on their premises. If so, all suspected food remaining should be hygienically contained, labelled as 'suspected unsafe food' and placed in refrigeration, separate from other food. If Queensland Health investigates, an environmental health officer will advise you what to do with the food.

If two or more people allege that they were sick from the same food or they ate food from your food business on the same day and time, you should contact the local Public Health Unit to report the incident.

For further information

The Queensland Department of Health has a variety of fact sheets with detailed information on food safety. These can be accessed at www.health.qld.gov.au.

If you have any further questions relating to the management of an alleged food-borne illness incident, contact the Queensland Health Public Health Unit for the area in which your food business is located. Contact details for Public Health Units can be found at www.health.qld.gov.au/cho.