



Safety Guidelines for Community Fridges

Community fridges connect individuals and local businesses with neighbors in need of safe and healthy food. These community-driven projects help address hunger, reduce food waste, and strengthen neighborhoods.

As with any food program, there are food safety risks. We can work together to limit risks and prevent illness from eating unsafe foods. If the requirements listed below, including allowed food donations, are followed, a food business license from the Rhode Island Department of Health may not be needed.

Requirements:

1. Community fridges must have at least two community contacts who are available to address any food safety or other operational concerns.
2. Volunteers should visit each community fridge at least weekly to clean the area and remove any foods that do not meet the basic food safety guidelines listed below.
3. Additionally, community fridges must follow these basic food safety guidelines:
 - Homemade foods are not allowed.
 - All prepared foods must come from a licensed food vendor. Licensed food vendors include grocery stores, restaurants, school food service vendors, health facilities, and caterers.
 - All fruits and vegetables must be washed under cold running water.
 - Perishable foods must maintain safe temperature. Perishable foods are foods that require temperature control (refrigeration or hot holding) to prevent illness. They must be held cold (below 41 degrees F) or hot (above 135 degrees F).
 - Foods must be labeled with all ingredients. The labeling must declare if the food has any of the nine major allergens (wheat, milk, eggs, soy, tree nuts, peanuts, fish, shellfish or sesame).
 - Perishable and shelf stable foods must have intact packaging (not torn or open, no water stains) and have no visible mold or other damage.
 - Perishable foods must be removed from the refrigerator by the “use by” or “sell-by” date that is listed on the packaging.
 - Foods must be kept dry and safe from pests like rodents and insects.
 - A thermometer should be placed in the refrigerator to monitor temperature and ensure it is maintained at 41 degrees F or below.

Foods Allowed	Foods Not Allowed
Washed fruits and vegetables	Unwashed fruits and vegetables
Prepared food from a licensed food business	Homemade prepared foods
Canned foods (e.g., soups, stews, fruits, vegetables, or tuna)	Perishable food left out of temperature which is above 41 F or below 135 F for 4 or more hours
Nut butters (e.g., peanut, almond, or sesame)	Open containers of food
Dry packaged foods like cereal, rice, or pasta	Unlabeled food items
Dried or canned beans or lentils	Out of date foods requiring refrigeration
Snacks (e.g., crackers, popcorn, granola bars, nuts, or dried fruit)	Moldy or foods visibly contaminated with dirt or debris
Milk, eggs, or packaged cheese	Damaged foods like broken eggs

The Center for Food Protection at the Rhode Island Department of Health is here to help. We are available to answer your questions about food safety and provide guidance on how to safely operate food donation programs such as community fridges. Reach the Center for Food Protection by phone at 401- 222-2749.

