

Meat Safety

Guidelines for the Safe Transportation of Carcasses, Poultry and Meat Products

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Introduction

These guidelines apply to everyone who handles, transports, distributes and stores meat products and carcasses destined for public sale and human consumption. This includes owners and operators of food premises, such as licensed slaughter facilities, butcher shops, food retailers and those who transport meat products to any of these facilities.

Background

Operators of food premises in British Columbia must ensure that meat intended for public sale is fit for human consumption. Operators and those who transport meat products are required to protect meat from contamination. They must also store, handle, prepare, display and dispense these foods in a sanitary manner as part of their routine operations and inspection program.

Meat products processed at slaughter or cut-and-wrap facilities have the potential to be soiled with a variety of biological, chemical and physical contaminants if not handled, stored and transported under appropriate conditions. Inadequate controls to protect meat can endanger the safety of meat products and create unacceptable levels of risk for consumers. If meat products are not maintained at appropriate temperatures, spoilage or the multiplication of disease-causing microorganisms or parasites could present a risk to human health.

Proper transportation of carcasses and meat products will reduce the potential for contamination. The following guidelines are provided to assist those who transport meat products.

Guidelines

Carcass Cleanliness

Ensure carcasses intended for human consumption and destined for sale have been slaughtered at a licensed facility. Animals slaughtered for personal use, or game animals, are the only exceptions to this rule. Carcasses from a provincially licensed slaughter facility have been examined and deemed to be clean, wholesome and fit for human consumption, which is an important quality-control step.

Ensure carcasses being transported to an approved cut-and-wrap facility are clean and -not contaminated before or during transport. Carcasses should be free from contaminants such as blood, hair, offal, manure or vegetation.

In some cases, it is better to leave the hide on the carcass for additional protection of the meat while en-route to an approved cut-and-wrap facility. If the hide is removed, the carcass should be otherwise protected during transport (see below). Only those experienced and knowledgeable in hide removal should carry out this task.

The operator of an approved cut-and-wrap facility should refuse any meat that appears to be diseased, unwholesome, spoiled or otherwise unfit, so it is essential to ensure protection of the carcass during transport.

Loading, Unloading and Transportation

Inspect the vehicle before loading. Remove items that may contaminate meat products, including fuel, oil, antifreeze, or residues such as wood fragments, gravel, sand and garbage.

Wash the vehicle, containers and equipment used for transport, and allow to air dry. Sanitize food contact surfaces.

Ensure loading and unloading methods prevent product contact with the floor, ground or other surfaces that may be contaminated. Ensure any equipment or surfaces that contact meat products are made of nontoxic, noncorrosive materials that can be effectively cleaned.

Practise good personal hygiene. Wash hands and exposed portions of arms thoroughly in an adequate hand-washing facility before loading and unloading, and as often as necessary—especially after smoking, eating, drinking or using the toilet or urinal. Do not eat food, drink beverages or use tobacco in any form while loading and unloading. Wear clean outer garments and some form of hair restraint.

Provide insulated containers with securely attached lids for smaller-sized products.

Provide a clean, designated protective tarp, industry-approved shipping bags/ shrouds or other suitable covers for products too large to fit in insulated containers. Tarps should be thoroughly sanitized and properly stored for future use (consider storing in freezer). Securely fasten covers during transport.

Pack meat products in a manner that separates them from other products to prevent cross-contamination. Use separate containers for raw and cooked or ready-to-eat products.

Maintaining Cold Temperatures

Consider the time of day and weather conditions before accepting meat products for transport. For example, if high temperatures are forecasted, arrange to pick up the shipment earlier in the day. If possible, avoid transporting on days with unsuitable weather.

Ensure carcasses and other meat products have been properly chilled to 4°C (40°F) or colder at the slaughter or cut-and-wrap facility before loading. Check the temperature with an accurate thermometer before accepting the product. Maintain a temperature of 4°C (40°F) or colder during transport.

Hold frozen products at -18°C (0°F) or colder, and ship in a way that prevents thawing and refreezing.

Limit transport time when meat products are without refrigeration. Where practical, transport wrapped meat products in insulated containers with clean ice packs or ice from an approved source.

Never allow meat products to be kept out of refrigeration for more than two hours unless other suitable means of maintaining temperatures are used.

Environmental Factors

Travel on dirt or gravel roads and exposure to wind, rain and direct sun may increase the risk of contamination or product damage, especially if meat products are unpackaged. Transport in open environments may also expose meat products to pests. As pests can carry diseases, products must not be exposed to conditions that permit pest access. Ensure tarps or covers are secured and consider double coverings. Keep containers closed, and minimize loading and unloading times.

Traceability

In addition to preventing contamination and maintaining temperatures, another critical public-health safeguard is the ability to determine the origin of meat products that may be related to known incidents of food-borne illness. The ability to trace products to their farm of origin and to any establishments involved in processing is essential so that products posing a risk to consumers can be effectively recalled from the market.

Ensure the proper copy of the manifest (Form 3) or bill of sale is delivered with any beef carcass, as required in designated areas of the province. Please contact Ownership Identification Inc. for further details: (250.314.9686) or <http://www.ownership-id.com/>.

Ensure proper labeling (e.g., tags, package labels or stamps) is provided on all carcasses or packages originating from licensed facilities or cut-and-wrap facilities.

Conclusion

Where meat products cannot be protected from contamination or where temperatures cannot be properly maintained, alternate means of transport must be obtained. Discard any products that became contaminated or were not properly temperature controlled during transport.

Remember, operators of food premises, including individuals transporting or distributing meat products, are responsible for ensuring meat products intended for sale to the public are fit for human consumption.

If you need clarification on any aspect of these guidelines, please contact your local health authority.

References

BC Food Safety Act. SBC 2002, c 28

BC Food Safety Act, Meat Inspection Regulation. BC Reg. 349/2004

BC Public Health Act, Food Premises Regulation. BC Reg. 210/99

Canadian Food Inspection System Implementation Group (2004). *Food Retail and Food Services Code*.

Canadian Food Inspection System Implementation Group. *National Meat and Poultry Code*.

Canadian Food Inspection Agency (2011). *Meat Hygiene Manual of Procedures*.

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