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trading standards law explained

Labelling of non-prepacked foods

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Although the United Kingdom left the European Union (EU) in 2021, certain pieces of legislation (known as 'assimilated law') continue to apply until such time as they are replaced by new UK legislation, revoked or permitted to expire. This means that our guidance still contains references to legislation that originated from the EU.

In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

This guidance is for England and Wales

This guidance relates to food that is loose and food that is packaged at the request of the consumer. This is collectively referred to as non-prepacked food.

The Food Information Regulations 2014 place minimal food information requirements on non-prepacked foods.

Until relatively recently, requirements for foods that are 'prepacked for direct sale' (PPDS) were similar to those for non-prepacked foods. They changed significantly in 2021, particularly in relation to allergen information ('Natasha's law'); information on PPDS foods has therefore been moved into a separate guide: 'Labelling of prepacked-for-direct-sale foods'.

Definitions

'Loose' means food that is sold or displayed without packaging - for example, ice cream displayed in a freezer and served into a tub.

'Food that is packaged at the request of the consumer' means food that is sold or displayed without packaging, but is placed in packaging after purchase - for example, a joint of ham displayed loose on a deli counter, slices of which are cut and placed into sealed bags when a consumer makes a purchase.

Food information requirements

You are required to provide the following food information for non-prepacked food:

- name of the food
- allergens present in the food
- in the case of a meat-containing product, a meat content declaration (see below)
- in the case of irradiated food, an irradiated food statement (see below)

Please refer to the 'How to provide food information' section below.

While non-prepacked foods have far fewer food information requirements than prepacked foods, any information that must appear follows identical rules as when it appears on a prepacked product.

Full details for the name of the food can be found in 'Labelling of prepacked foods: product name'.

If you freshly prepare food that is ready for consumption, at the request of the consumer (cafes, restaurants, sandwich bars, catering vans, etc), there is no requirement to label the food with a name.

Meat-containing products

A meat-containing product is any product that contains meat as an ingredient.

You are required to declare how much of the product is made of meat in the form of a percentage; this is referred to as a quantitative ingredient declaration (QUID).

Full details for QUID can be found in 'Labelling of prepacked foods: QUID' (non-prepacked foods are not affected by any other QUID requirements, only the percentage of meat).

In the case of products that do not have an ingredients list, the QUID should be presented as a statement specifying the type and amount of meat - for example, 'X% meat'.

Where more than one type of meat has been used, you must declare the content of each - for example, 'X% chicken, X% pork'.

The QUID can alternatively be given in the name of the product - for example, 'Sausage roll (20% pork)'.

There are compositional requirements that some meat-containing products must comply with; full details can be found in 'Composition of products containing meat'.

The following products do not require a QUID for the meat content:

- raw meat with no added ingredients
- chicken and poultry cuts with no added water
- sandwiches and similar products (excluding burgers) that are ready to eat
- pizzas and similar products
- soups, broths and gravies

Irradiated food statement

If the food (or any ingredient in the food) has been irradiated, the words 'irradiated' or 'treated with ionising radiation' must appear in close proximity to the name of the food.

How to provide food information

On the product

If possible, the information can be presented on a label that is on the packaging, attached to the packaging, or visible through the packaging.

On a notice

The information can appear on a notice in close proximity to the product or on the shelf edge.

Verbally

In the case of allergen information only, you can give the customer the information verbally. You must place a notice in close proximity to the product (or on the product itself) inviting customers to ask a member of staff for allergen information - for example, 'Please ask us about allergens in our food'. Refer to 'Food allergens and intolerance' for full details.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see 'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: November 2025

Key legislation

- Food Safety Act 1990
- assimilated Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 *on the provision of food information to consumers*
- Food Information Regulations 2014
- Food Information (Wales) Regulations 2014

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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