

## CHEMICAL SAMPLES

As part of the food sampling programme, food samples are taken and analysed in the laboratories for their chemical composition. The range of analysis is quite extensive, and set time periods allocated throughout the year to sample for specific foods and characteristic constituents.

Typical examples taken from the Chemical Programme include

- Biogenic Amines in fresh fish
- Cadmium in coffee & tea
- Artificial Colours in drinks
- Artificial Sweeteners in specific foods
- Preservatives
- Mycotoxins such as aflatoxin, ochratoxin and patulin
- Gluten in foods labelled as gluten-free



## UNSATISFACTORY SAMPLES

A food sample is deemed to be unsatisfactory when it does not meet the parameters against which it is being tested.

In the event of unsatisfactory samples, Environmental Health Officers investigate to try and identify the cause. Typically this may involve follow-up inspections of premises, further sampling and investigation of any related premises or foodstuffs.

## COMPLAINT SAMPLES

Food complaints and food poisoning notifications received are investigated. Often a complaint investigation may lead Environmental Health Officers to obtain food samples from the premises in question. Similarly, the nature of the complaint may necessitate suspect food being analysed if available

For further information contact your local Environmental Health Officer details on [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) or log on to [www.fsai.ie](http://www.fsai.ie)



**HSE**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL**  
**HEALTH**

**FOOD**  
**SAMPLING**

The Environmental Health Officers' Service plays a key role in a food sampling programme which aims to protect the public, assist food business operators to meet their obligations with regards to food safety standards. and enforce relevant food legislation.



## FOOD SAMPLING PROGRAMME

The programme is risk based and concentrates on food produced and/or food sold within Ireland. This covers a wide range of products sampled throughout the food industry including food manufacturers, importers, hotels, restaurants, licensed premises, shops/ stalls and takeaways.

Food sampling focuses on foods which are ready to eat such as sandwich fillings, salads, cooked meats, drinks, ice-cream, rice and pasta. EHOs are authorised by law to take foods without payment for the purposes of formal sampling.

Food sampling is an integral part of food control. . Sampling can be carried out as a routine activity, as part of food premises inspection, as a result of a complaint or as part of national and local food surveys. Sampling may also result in enforcement action.

A cohesive sampling programme is developed each year by the EHOs and the Food Safety Laboratory Service with input from the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. This annual programme guides sampling activities on a national and local basis. Samples are taken for microbiological and chemical analysis to determine safety and compliance with food law requirements such as compositional standards or compliance with food additive rules.

Matters considered in the formation of the programme include:

- EU and national legal requirements
- EU, national and local food safety matters
- Food safety matters of interest
- Food safety research in the area
- Emerging food safety trends and pathogens

## MICROBIOLOGICAL SAMPLES

As part of the sampling programme routine and survey samples are taken for microbiological analysis.

- Routine samples are generally samples of ready to eat foods from food premises.
- Survey samples are from specific foods selected at various periods throughout the year e.g. whipped ice cream during the summer months.

Food samples are taken for microbiological analysis by Environmental Health Officers from food premises, and are submitted for analysis to one of the seven official food microbiology laboratories.

Food samples are analysed for a range of microbiological criteria. Typically this includes the principal food-poisoning bacteria, and organisms that may indicate suspicion of possible contamination. The main bacterial analyses are

*Enterobacteriaceae*  
*Escherichia coli (total)*  
*Salmonella spp.*  
*Campylobacter spp.*  
*Escherichia coli O157 & other VTEC*  
*Vibrio parahaemolyticus*  
*Listeria monocytogenes*  
*Staphylococcus aureus*  
*Clostridium perfringens*  
*Bacillus cereus & other pathogenic Bacillus spp.*

Swabs from food equipment or other contact surfaces may also be taken and tested