

For Information

DATE: September 27, 2012

REPORT TITLE: **RETAIL FOOD SAFETY IN PEEL REGION**

FROM: Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services
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OBJECTIVE

To provide an update on the retail food safety program to Regional Council.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In compliance with provincial requirements, Peel Public Health provides a comprehensive retail food safety program.
- Voluntary food handler training and certification courses are offered.
- Unannounced retail food premises inspections are conducted at a frequency determined by a risk assessment of each premises.
- The total number of food premises under inspection has increased from 5,021 in 2009 to 5,353 currently (approximately 6.6 per cent), primarily as a result of development in northeast and northwest Brampton, and the Meadowvale and Square One areas, and assuming responsibility for inspections on the Greater Toronto Airport Authority property.
- The FoodCheck Peel food safety performance disclosure program, introduced in 2005, has been very well received and effective in reducing retail food safety risks. Enhancements to the program are underway.
- Peel Health staff work collaboratively with provincial and federal food inspection agencies on food recalls and other potential threats to the safety of our food supply.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

This report provides a summary of the mandate and delivery of the retail food inspection program delivered by Peel Public Health staff, including a summary of growth in food premises under inspection during the last three years and performance metrics associated with the program.

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2. Findings

a) Mandate

The Ontario *Health Protection and Promotion Act* requires the inspection of food premises. The Food Safety program standard under the Ontario Public Health Standards requires, amongst other things, that boards of health:

- Conduct surveillance of food premises and suspected and confirmed food-borne illnesses.
- Report on Food Safety program data elements as required by the Ministry.
- Ensure food handlers and food business operators have access to training in safe food handling practices.

The Food Safety Protocol under the program standard specifies operational roles and responsibilities with respect to surveillance and inspection, management and response, education and training, and reporting.

b) Food Handler Training and Certification

Voluntary food handler training and certification courses are offered in either a full-day classroom format or through home study and a challenge exam. As of January, 2012 all classroom-based courses and home study examination sessions are held at 7120 Hurontario Street. The classroom sessions are offered three times per month and the home study examination is proctored twice a month. Results of the 2011 Business Survey which is part of the Region's bi-annual Client Satisfaction Survey reported very high satisfaction scores, averaging 9.3 out of 10. Appendix I shows the number of participants in this program between 2009 and 2012 year to date.

c) Food Safety Inspections

There are currently 5,353 retail food service premises and food stores under inspection by Peel Public Health staff.

Public health inspectors are assigned a geographic area and are responsible for food safety inspections in their district, from pre-operational approval and inspection through routine, unannounced, inspections at a prescribed frequency. They are also responsible for complaint investigation, including allegations of food-borne illness associated with premises in their district.

The frequency of inspection is a minimum of three times per year for high risk premises, two times per year for medium risk premises, and once per year for low risk premises. Risk factors taken into consideration when categorizing premises as high, medium or low risk include:

- The vulnerability of the population served (e.g. hospitals and seniors' residences preparing and serving full meals);
- Food risk (degree of hazard, complexity of preparation, volume of hazardous foods served);
- Association with suspected or confirmed food-borne illness;
- History of non-compliance with the Food Premises regulation, unsafe food handling practices, and/or consumer complaints.

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In 2011 food premise operators, through the Business Survey, also reported very high satisfaction scores, averaging 9.3 out of 10.

Appendix I reports the distribution of retail food premises under inspection by risk category from 2009 to 2012 year to date. With Council approval, staff were added to the Food Safety program in the mid 2000's resulting in food inspection completion rates close to 100 per cent. This is also reflected in Appendix I.

d) Growth in Food Premises under Inspection

Appendix I reports the increase in food premises under inspection by Peel Public Health staff by risk category for the past three years.

Each year a considerable number of food premises discontinue operations and a new business opens at the same location. Sometimes this is the result of businesses being sold to a new owner/operator, and sometimes premises' owners elect to close and re-open.

The total number of food premises under inspection has increased from 5,021 in 2009 to 5,353 currently, or by approximately 6.6 per cent. The areas of net growth in food premises between 2009 and 2012 have been in northeast and northwest Brampton and the Meadowvale and Square One areas.

In addition, Peel Health recently assumed responsibility for inspections on the Greater Toronto Airport Authority property. From 1995 to 2011, Health Canada, under contract with the GTAA, provided food premises inspection service on the Pearson International Airport property. In 2011, staff of the Public Health Bureau of Health Canada gave notice to the GTAA that they would be terminating their inspection contract due to a change in the focus of their program. GTAA staff requested Peel Public Health to assume responsibility for food inspections on airport property, pointing out that tenants of the GTAA are assessed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) and pay municipal property taxes directly to the municipality.

e) FoodCheck Peel Program

In 2005 the FoodCheck Peel food safety performance disclosure program was launched. The program is modeled on the very successful DineSafe program which was implemented in Toronto several years before.

The main components of the FoodCheck Peel program are:

- Colour-coded signs that must be posted at the main public entrance to food service premises and food stores (Green=Pass; Yellow=Conditional Pass; Red=Closed).
- A website (www.peelregion.ca/health/foodcheck/index.htm) where summarized inspection results of the last three inspections are posted. The website also features a map to assist consumers in making food choices.

In 2011, 290 yellow and 17 red signs were issued. In 2012 from January 1 to September 30, 190 yellow and 18 red signs were issued.

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The FoodCheck Peel program was evaluated in 2007 and 2008, with the results being reported to Council in October, 2008. All key stakeholders surveyed voiced overwhelming support of the program.

Environmental Health Division staff are currently working on enhancements to the program, including:

- Changes to the inspection score algorithm to more accurately reflect food safety risks.
- Website improvements (e.g. make searching easier, mapping and search functions, plain language).
- Using plain language in inspection reports.

It is expected that these enhancements will be completed by the summer of 2013 at which time the refreshed program will be re-launched.

f) Retail Food Safety Program Outcomes

The Government of Canada estimates that there are about 11 million cases of food-borne illness in Canada every year. The overall goal of the retail food safety program is to prevent the burden of food-borne illness. Many food-borne illnesses can be prevented by following safe food-handling practices, both in public establishments and at home.

While food-borne illness from all causes is a reportable disease, due to significant under-reporting across North America it is very difficult to track directly the contribution of food inspection programs to reduced illness. A number of proxy indicators are therefore used to evaluate the effectiveness of food safety inspections in reducing risk.

As reported to Council in October, 2008, between November 2005 when the FoodCheck Peel program was implemented and 2008, the average number of yellow, conditional pass signs issued per year declined from a high of 7.5 per cent in 2005 to a low of 4.9 per cent in 2008. From 2009 to 2011, the average number of yellow, conditional pass signs issued continued to decline to a low of 3.6 per cent. This is an additional 1.3 per cent improvement in compliance with food safety regulations to 96.4 per cent.

Public Health staff also monitor critical infractions that could lead to food-borne illness on inspection reports and ensure that appropriate action is taken to reduce food risks, up to and including ordering food premises closed.

g) Provincial and Federal Food Inspection Responsibilities

Peel Public Health focuses on retail food safety while other provincial and federal agencies focus on other aspects of food production and distribution.

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) is responsible for ensuring that food produced in Ontario is safe and for supporting the agri-food industry. With respect to inspection, Ministry staff working under the *Food Safety and Quality Act (2001)*, regulate meat, eggs and dairy products processed in provincially inspected plants. Peel Health staff do not routinely inspect food production at such plants, but retail food premises associated with provincial plants are inspected.

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The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), responsible to the federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, has a broad mandate to safeguard the Canadian food supply. With respect to inspection, CFIA staff visit food production facilities from which products are shipped across provincial or international borders. Similar to provincially inspected food plants, Peel Health staff only routinely inspect areas of federal food plants which are open to the general public.

Peel Public Health, CFIA and OMAFRA staff periodically work together on food recalls with potential public health implications, and at times when the food production and distribution system may be compromised.

CONCLUSION

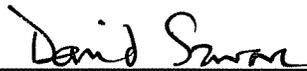
Peel Public Health staff offer a comprehensive retail food safety program consisting of voluntary food handler training and certification, risk-based inspections, response to complaints, and food safety performance disclosure.



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Approved for Submission:

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c. Legislative Services

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APPENDIX I

**Peel Public Health
Environmental Health Division
Retail Food Safety Service Level Indicators**

	2009	2010	2011	2012	
				Q1	Q2
Food Safety Inspections					
High Risk					
Facility Count	294	271	263	258	265
Completion Rate	97.0%	97.4%	99.3%	98.4%	100.0%
Medium Risk					
Facility Count	3047	3160	3259	3339	3341
Completion Rate	96.7%	98.1%	98.0%	51.2%	47.8%
Low Risk					
Facility Count	1680	1678	1780	1745	1747
Completion Rate	99.2%	93.5%	97.6%	31.3%	20.8%
Overall					
Facility Count	5021	5109	5302	5342	5353
Completion Rate	97.2%	97.1%	98.2%		
Food Handler Training and Certification					
Full Day Classroom				YTD	
Attended	975	1179	944	1129	
Passed	942	1129	904	1084	
Failed	33	50	40	45	
Home Study Exams					
Attended	475	398	597	460	
Passed	438	363	531	376	
Failed	37	35	66	24	