

For Immediate Release

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Illegal Food Sales

Wichita Falls, Texas – The Wichita Falls-Wichita County Public Health District is experiencing a large influx of calls regarding illegal food sales. With the Holiday season approaching, it is becoming increasingly common to find individuals selling plate meals and other food without a permit. The Health District has also received complaints from individuals who have gotten sick following the consumption of the food.

The Health District would like to remind citizens that you must have a permit in order to provide food to the public, even if you are not accepting money for the food. If you would like to sell or provide food to the public, there are three ways to do so:

1. Obtain a temporary event permit from the Health District. A temporary event permit allows for the distribution of food made at the event location. An example of a temporary event is a hamburger feed fundraiser.
2. Have a cottage food operation. You must have a food handler's card, but you may sell certain non-potentially hazardous food, such as cakes and pastries, that do not require refrigeration for safety and that are prepared in your home. Your items must be labeled that they are prepared in a kitchen that is not inspected. A list of foods allowed to be sold by a cottage food operation, as well as further explanation of the cottage food law may be found at texascottagefoodlaw.com.
3. Obtain a state manufactured food license. This is the license needed to prepare and package foods to sell from a retail food establishment. An example of manufactured food is canned salsa. More information about the manufactured food license may be found at <http://www.dshs.texas.gov/foods/manufacturers.aspx>.

The Wichita Falls-Wichita County Public Health District's Environmental Health Division will continue to try to take enforcement action against those who are selling food illegally; however, the nature of internet and social media sales makes it difficult to catch and prosecute those individuals who are selling food illegally. In the meantime, the public is urged to not purchase and consume food items that are sold illegally. This food is not inspected; there is no assurance that it was cooked and held at the proper temperatures, or prepared in a sanitary environment.

The CDC estimates that each year roughly 1 in 6 Americans gets sick and 3,000 die of foodborne diseases. Most people attribute food poisoning to the last commercial food establishment they ate prior to getting sick, but that is often not the case. Most foodborne illnesses have a 24-48 hour incubation period before symptoms arise and some can even have incubation periods of a few months. If you believe you have contracted food poisoning:

1. Immediately write down a three-day food history that includes everything you consumed, including those items you prepared yourself and drinks.
2. Go to the doctor. A food poisoning diagnosis is confirmed via a stool sample.
3. If you have confirmed food poisoning, your doctor will contact the Health District and a foodborne illness investigation will start. This is why the three-day food history becomes very important.

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