

## Providing vegan food and cross contamination: a fact sheet for food providers and vegans

**There is currently no legal definition of 'vegan' food, but food information must not be misleading. It should be accurate, clear and easy to understand for the consumer.** Information on standards for vegan food can be found here:  
<https://www.vegansociety.com/your-business/vegan-trade-mark-standards>

### Advice for caterers

Caterers that want to describe products as suitable for vegans must avoid cross contamination for the description not to be misleading. They should adopt sensible and reasonable practices in food storage, preparation and cooking, including not using the same grill, fat fryer etc. for both meat and vegan products because of the real risk of cross contamination.

The best practice in situations where vegan food cannot be guaranteed is to use descriptions such as:

- plant based,
- no animal containing ingredients,
- vegetable based
- and, importantly, be able to explain to customers why it is not described as vegan.

Be careful not to mislead consumers: For example, you should not claim that you provide vegan food if, in a subsequent disclaimer, you state that food may not, in fact, be vegan.

### Advice for consumers

If food is described as 'vegan' you can reasonably expect it to have been stored, prepared and cooked away from sources of non-vegan foods. However, it is not unlawful for food providers to store, prepare and cook vegetables and plant-based food with non-vegan food items in mixed environments. If food is described as vegan and you are concerned, you should ask for

more information and be given clear, accurate information in response.

Ask for more information where you see descriptions such as:

- plant based,
- no animal containing ingredients,
- vegetable based

Food Safety Act offences could include situations where products have been described as vegan but contain pieces of meat or dairy products. However, human error, disclaimers and the due diligence processes of food providers are relevant factors and can be used in defence.

If you wish to complain about a food service provider, you can contact:

- Citizens Advice Consumer Service:  
<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/contact-us/consumer-service/>
- The Food Standards Agency:  
<https://www.food.gov.uk/contactconsumersfind-details/contact-food-standards-agency>
- Your local authority:  
<https://www.gov.uk/find-local-trading-standards-office>

Under consumer law you are entitled to service with reasonable care and skill and a refund if what you are given is not what you ordered.

You have the right to take legal action for alleged breaches of civil law as it applies to food but there is no evidence that the emotional distress endured by vegans involved in cross contamination cases would meet the threshold for a successful case outcomes.