



Shelf-life table NVWA, Annex info sheet 76 (May 2025)

version 7 - June 2025



Product	Description	Spoilage signs	Shelf-life guideline
Short shelf life			
Fresh meat, chicken, fish, cold cuts	These products often have a “use-by date” (TGT) and cooling (7°C or colder) is almost always required. For raw chicken and fish, the limit is 4°C	Bacterial growth (sometimes mould) Bad smell or strange colour	NEVER accept or give out products after the use-by (TGT) or best-before (THT) date. The customer must still be able to eat the product on the TGT/THT date. If the cold chain has been broken, do NOT distribute!
Pastries / cake			
Chilled meals, salads			
Freshly pressed (not heated) fruit juice			
Cut vegetables and fruit (fresh)	Eggs may be given out until at the best-before (THT) date		NEVER give out past beste-before (THT) date
Eggs			
Limited shelf life (2)			
Soft cheeses	These foods sometimes have a use-by (TGT) date. Cooling (7°C or colder) required	Bacterial growth (sometimes mould) Bad smell or strange colour	NEVER accept or give out products after the use-by (TGT) or best-before (THT) date. The customer must still be able to eat the product on the TGT/THT date. If the cold chain has been broken, do NOT distribute!
Bread, rye bread, bake-off bread		Musty, mold growth	
Cake, filled cookies, soft cookies, 'ontbijtkoek'			
Semi-preserved (herring, mussels, etc.)	Cooling (7°C or colder) required	Fat going rancid	
Cut hard cheeses (sliced, grated)	Vegetarian smoked sausage, vegetarian 'meat' pieces		Observe the best-before (THT) date ; exceptions are possible, but be sure to judge carefully! Fresh bread can be frozen, preferably give out and consume within 2-3 weeks.
Ready-made meat substitutes			
Milk substitutes based on oats, soy, almonds, etc.		Bacterial growth (sometimes mould)	
Vegetables and fruit (fresh, not soft fruit)		Mold growth	Visually assess (must not show any spoilage)
Limited shelf life (1)			
Pasturized milk		Bacterial growth (sometimes mould) Bad smell or strange colour	For acceptance, observe the use-by (TGT) / best-before (THT) date ; distribution is only permitted up to 1 day after the best-before date if the product shows no signs of spoilage: -Product appearance: no mold, no cloudiness (if unusual), and/or no slime; -Packaging: swollen packaging indicates unwanted gas formation due to spoilage; If the product still looks normal after opening the packaging, smells good (not unusual, rotten, or chemically), and tastes good (not strange or unpleasant), and has been stored refrigerated, then the product can still be safely consumed after the best-before date. Allow a maximum of 1 day for this. If in doubt, discard the product. If the cooling chain has been interrupted, do NOT hand out!
Dairy-based and cream-based desserts			
Buttermilk, yogurt, cottage cheese and other fermented dairy products	These products may have a use-by (TGT) date or a best-before (THT) date. Cooling (7°C or colder) required.	Souring and protein settling, bacterial growth (sometimes mould) Bad smell or strange colour	For acceptance, observe the use-by (TGT) / best-before (THT) date ; distribution is only permitted up to 5 day after the best-before date if the product shows no signs of spoilage: -Product appearance: no mold, no cloudiness (if unusual), and/or no slime; -Packaging: swollen packaging indicates unwanted gas formation due to spoilage; If the product still looks normal after opening the packaging, smells good (not unusual, rotten, or chemically), and tastes good (not strange or unpleasant), and has been stored refrigerated, then the product can still be safely consumed after the best-before date. Allow a maximum of 1 day for this. If in doubt, discard the product. If the cooling chain has been interrupted, do NOT hand out!



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Product	Description	Spoilage signs	Shelf-life guideline
Long shelf life			
Dry biscuits/cookies		Musty, loss of taste, change in taste, drying out, change in texture, presence of mites and insects	Up to 2 months (and possibly longer) after the best-before (THT) date, provided the product still retains its characteristic properties and no defects are visible in the product or packaging. With the exception of infant formula: observe the best before (THT) date!
Muesli, breakfast cereals, cornflakes			
Bread spreads (peanut butter, chocolate sprinkles, sweet spreads)			
Crisps/chips, savoury snacks, peanuts			
Oil, frying fat			
Instant powder, fat	Soup, milk powder		
Margarine, butter			
Hard cheeses	For example Gouda, Emmentaler, Parmesan	Rancidity of the fat, odor changes, color changes, oxidation, mold formation, presence of insects	
Candy (soft)	With filling, chocolate, licorice		
Sauces	French fries sauce, mayonnaise, ketchup		
Former canned goods in packaging other than cans/glass	For example soup, vegetables, legumes in stand-up pouches or packets		
Sterilized milk, dairy products, and milk substitutes based on oats, soy, almonds, etc.	UHT-packaged long-life milk, custard, oat drink in cartons, sterilized products in bottles	Ambient odor can effect product. Taste changes or loss.	
Refridgerated fruit juices (that have been heated)	Refridgerated fruit juices	Odor change, color change, taste change, mold formation	For fresh juices, monitor the temperature at 7°C or lower
Frozen products	Fresh products, frozen at the latest on use-by (TGT) date or best-before (THT) date	Dehydration (freezer burn), going rancid	For frozen products, monitor the temperature at -18 degrees or lower
Very long shelf life			
Salt, sugar, flour		No spoilage if stored dry. May become musty after a very long time. Also pay attention to hardness, moisture absorption, the presence of insects, mites, rancidity, and mold.	Up to 1 year (and possibly longer) after the best-before (THT) date, provided the product still retains its characteristic properties and no defects are visible in the product or packaging. With the exception of infant formula: observe the best before (THT) date!
Dry pasta products	Noodles, macaroni, spaghetti		
Couscous, semolina, rice			
Coffee, tea			
Instant powder, low fat	Coffee powder, spice mix, pudding		
Water, soft drinks and UHT-treated drinks (e.g. cartons of fruit juice)		Taste may deteriorate (enzymatic browning), water: algae formation	
Canned goods, tin/glass	Vegetables, fruit, soup, meat, fish, coffee milk, jam	Rust formation on tin, caps. Gas formation (bulging), color or odor changes	
Syrup, molasses, honey		Saccharification, this is not a spoilage characteristic	For frozen products, monitor the temperature at -18 degrees or lower
Candy (hard)	Lollipops, sour candies		
Frozen products	Originally marketed as a frozen product	Dehydration, rancidity of fat	

Cold chain: Monitoring temperature during storage, transport and distribution — from receiving to giving out.