

What happens if a customer gets sick because of food served in my establishment?

If this happens, the person in charge of a food establishment should take some basic information from the customer, such as name, phone number, date, food eaten, symptoms, etc., then notify the DEH within 24 hours after the illness is reported. DEH staff will gather all of the facts and may make an inspection of your establishment to try and determine what could have contributed to the illness. Please be aware that many complaints of illness are not investigated and there is no presumption of guilt on the operator.

What else can I do to prevent others from getting sick?

In addition to following proper food preparation and storage procedures, it is required that you not allow an ill food handler to work. This includes any person with diarrhea, vomiting, boils, infected wounds, sores, or an acute respiratory infection and other illnesses such as hepatitis.

When does the health department conduct inspections?

The frequency varies with the type of business and the potential risk. Restaurants are currently inspected approximately four times per year. Markets and other food businesses are checked less often. The business is expected to accommodate the DEH staff in the inspection, making available employee training records and food purchase receipts, if needed.

What are the most common violations of health standards?

The most common violations are: improper food temperatures, poor employee hygiene (hand washing), cross contamination of food, and the use of products from unapproved sources.

If problems are found, then what?

Violations are always clearly described by DEH staff in writing and are to be corrected within a reasonable period, which varies according to the type of problem.

If DEH staff determine that the establishment is in serious violation of the California Health and Safety Code or other applicable codes, the permit to operate may be suspended or revoked. A permit may be permanently revoked if there are serious violations of the Health Laws and is thereby causing an immediate and substantial hazard to the public health.

Serious violations may result in a fine of \$500.00, or imprisonment in the county jail for a period not to exceed six months, or both.

Please contact the Food and Housing Duty Specialist at (619) 338-2379 or email: fhdutye@sdcounty.ca.gov if you have any other questions.

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GUIDE TO OPENING A NEW FOOD BUSINESS



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What are our responsibilities if we want to serve food?

You must have a permit. It is unlawful to operate a food establishment in San Diego County without first obtaining a permit from the County Department of Environmental Health (DEH). This permit is required per the California Health and Safety Code, in order to safeguard the public from potential health hazards related to food.

What about our facility/ building?

Your facility must be a commercial kitchen, not residential. You may decide to use an existing food business or build a new one. Most existing facilities already meet the standard requirements and should already include the needed equipment. New facilities require plan review and approval before opening. DEH has a publication, the “New Construction Guide”, which provides more detailed information.

What permits do we need? Where do we get them?

An application for a permit to operate a food establishment must be submitted to the DEH. In addition, a food permit holder cannot operate a food establishment without verifying that all employees have valid food handler cards and that there is a Certified Food Service Manager on site to train the employees in safe food handling. Other permits may be required by other agencies, including business licenses and registering with the State Franchise Tax Board for sales tax reporting.

How long does it take to get a permit? How much does it cost?

Upon receipt of a completed application and the permit fee, DEH staff will make an inspection to determine if the proposed establishment complies with the provisions of Health and Safety and any other applicable law or standard. DEH staff shall complete the inspection and issue or deny the permit within a reasonable time not to exceed thirty days. Permits are usually issued within 10 days of application. The fees for a new permit for a food establishment vary according to the size of the operation and start at \$290 per year. All food establishment permits expire annually.

What about food handler training? Why is it necessary?

Training and testing is required of all food handlers including managers and supervisors, and any other persons engaged in food preparation or service. The purpose is to assure a thorough knowledge of food safety and sanitation procedures, including the principles of proper hygiene, cleaning and sanitizing.



Is there special training for managers?

Yes. Managers must be certified by passing a state approved exam. There must be at least one person in each food facility that is certified and responsible for food safety and training of staff.

Where can I get training?

Food Handler and Manager training is available from a variety of sources. Ask for the listing of Authorized Food Handler Training Schools or call our 24-hour information line (619) 338-2484.

What do I need to be concerned about when serving food?

Your primary responsibility is to serve safe food. Food may be unsafe for any of the following reasons:

- X It contains a diseased, contaminated, filthy, putrid, or decomposed substance.
- X It is stored, prepared, packaged, served, vended, or otherwise provided under unsanitary conditions.
- X It is stored in a container that potentially contaminates the food.

In short, all food products must come from an approved commercial source and be free from contamination.