

Preparing for Health Inspections

Ensuring that your restaurant is clean and serves fresh, safe food to customers is your greatest responsibility, and health inspections are a way for you to learn how to best uphold this responsibility. To observe you when you are running operations as you normally would, inspectors often make impromptu inspections. Many inspections are performed during the frenzy of mealtimes so inspectors can have an accurate idea of how food is prepared at your facility. How can you make the best of these inspections? There are several ways you can effectively prepare.

Before the Inspection

Being prepared for a health inspection means understanding food law and food safety when you are planning the restaurant and at all times after its opening. Your local authority and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) website, www.food.gov.uk, can be good starting points for advice. Follow these recommendations to help you prepare:

- Perform regular self-inspections of your operations. Put yourself in the inspector's role. Establish a time-frame in which you will perform these inspections, such as once every week. Some typical considerations:
 - How are foods cooked, cooled and reheated?
 - How often and in what way are temperatures recorded? Are thermometers functional?
 - How are potentially hazardous raw foods prepared and served?
 - How do you handle leftovers?
 - What is your food labelling process?

- Where and how is food washed and prepped?
- What is your hand washing and glove use policy?
- When, how and by whom is equipment cleaned and sanitised?
- What is the process for training new employees?
- Establish priorities based on the characteristics of your restaurant or its problem areas. For example, if you decide to focus on food temperature, instruct employees to take the temperature of products when they arrive, when they are stored and when they are served.

Consider health inspectors your allies in preventing unsafe practices at your restaurant that could increase your potential risks.

During the Inspection

When undergoing a health inspection, it is important to maintain a cooperative, professional and open attitude. Establishing a good relationship with local health inspectors is fundamental.

- Give the inspector a cordial greeting. Politely ask to see credentials.
- Tour with the health inspector. Think of the inspector as an outside auditor, and the inspection as an opportunity to prevent foodborne illness at your restaurant.

Provided by Robison & Co Ltd

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- If you are not able to tour with the health inspector, assign a manager or staff member to take your place.
- Never argue or be defensive with an inspector.
- Never offer favours or food to an inspector.
- If you are written up for any violations, make sure you understand what they are and how to correct them. Ask the health inspector to suggest a way to fix the problem.

After the Inspection

The information gained from your inspector is extremely valuable. It is important to maximise the knowledge you gain during inspections by relaying it to staff and incorporating it into your day-to-day activities.

- Hold a 10-minute briefing session with kitchen staff after the inspection, emphasising the importance of maintaining health standards. Add your own management guidelines to make your argument more authoritative.
- If you have staff for whom English is a second language, ask a bilingual staff member to interpret for you during these briefings.
- Encourage staff to participate in the conversation. Ask for questions and suggestions.
- Continue to perform regular self-inspections, taking into account the inspector's advice or findings.

Proper food preparation is not only a matter of complying with the law—it also means avoiding disastrous foodborne illness originating at your restaurant. Consider health inspectors to be your allies in preventing unsafe practices at your restaurant that could increase your risk.

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