

# Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

The scheme helps you choose where to eat out or shop for food by giving you clear information about the businesses' hygiene standards. We run the scheme in partnership with local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The scheme gives businesses a rating from 5 to 0 which is displayed at their premises and online so you can make more informed choices about where to buy and eat food.

5 – hygiene standards are very good

4 – hygiene standards are good

3 – hygiene standards are generally satisfactory

2 – some improvement is necessary

1 – major improvement is necessary

0 – urgent improvement is required

[Search for food hygiene ratings](#)

The scheme is set out in law in Wales and Northern Ireland but display of the rating sticker is voluntary in England.



Food Hygiene Rating Sticker with a rating of five

## What the rating covers

Ratings are a snapshot of the standards of food hygiene found at the time of inspection. It is the responsibility of the business to comply with food hygiene law at all times.

This includes:

- handling of food
- how food is stored
- how food is prepared
- cleanliness of facilities
- how food safety is managed

The food hygiene rating scheme does not provide information on the following factors:

- quality of the food
- customer service
- culinary skill
- presentation
- comfort

For suspected food poisoning, seek medical advice from your GP and [contact your local environmental health or food safety team](#).

## Understanding ratings

The rating shows how well the business is doing overall, based on standards found at the time of inspection. The ratings can be found online and on stickers which are displayed at business premises. The back of the sticker and the online rating will also show the date of the inspection by the local authority's food safety officer.

Ratings are typically given to places where food is supplied, sold or consumed, such as:

- restaurants, pubs and cafes
- takeaways, food vans and stalls
- canteens and hotels
- supermarkets and other food shops
- schools, hospitals and care homes

A food safety officer from the local authority inspects a business to check that it follows food hygiene law so that the food is safe to eat.

At the inspection, the officer will check the following three elements:

- how hygienically the food is handled – how it is prepared, cooked, re-heated, cooled and stored
- the physical condition of the business –including cleanliness, layout, lighting, ventilation, pest control and other facilities
- how the business manages ways of keeping food safe, looking at processes, training and systems to ensure good hygiene is maintained. The officer can then assess the level of confidence in standards being maintained in the future

## **Exemptions**

There are two groups of exempt businesses which are inspected by the local authority food safety officer but are not given a food hygiene rating:

- businesses that are low-risk to public health, for example, newsagents, chemist shops or visitor centres selling pre-wrapped goods that do not require refrigeration
- childminders and businesses that offer caring services at home

## **The rating scale**

The hygiene standards found at the time of inspection are then rated on a scale:

- 5 is top of the scale, this means the hygiene standards are very good and fully comply with the law
- 0 is at the bottom of the scale, this means urgent improvement is necessary

To get the top rating, businesses must do well in all three elements which are referenced above. If the top rating is not given, the officer will explain to the business the necessary actions they can take to improve their hygiene rating.

A breakdown of the three elements making up the food hygiene rating for business is also provided with the online rating. This information is available for businesses inspected since April 2016 in England and Northern Ireland and for businesses inspected in Wales since November 2014.

Detailed information is included in the food safety officer's inspection report. If you want to see this you could [make a Freedom of Information \(FOI\) request](#) to the local authority that carried out

the inspection. You can find the local authority's contact details by [searching for the business](#) and then clicking on the name of the business.

The local authority will consider your FOI request and will usually send you a copy of the report. In some cases, the local authority may decide that they cannot do so but will let you know this and explain why. Any concerns relating to a business's food safety can be reported to the local food safety team who are responsible for the business. You can find the local authority's contact details by [searching for the business](#) and then clicking on the name of the business.

## **Finding a rating**

[Browse our ratings online.](#)

Ratings can be displayed in an obvious location within the business' window or door. You can also ask a member of staff what rating was given at the last inspection. Putting a hygiene rating on show is a good advertisement for businesses that meet the requirements of food hygiene law. If the rating is low you can then choose to buy your food or meal from a place with a higher rating.

Businesses in England do not have to display their rating at their premises but are encouraged to do so.

Businesses in Wales are legally required to display their ratings in a prominent place, like the front door, entrance or window of the business. All businesses in Wales must provide information on their rating verbally if requested in person or over the phone.

The scheme applies to businesses who sell to businesses including food manufacturers and wholesalers. Takeaways must include a bilingual statement on menu leaflets and flyers which tells consumers how to find details of the rating on our website.

Businesses in Northern Ireland are legally required to display their ratings at or near each customer entrance like the front door, entrance or window of the business. Stickers must be displayed in a location where they can be readily seen and easily read by customers before they enter the establishment when it is open for business.

All businesses in Northern Ireland must provide information on their rating verbally if requested in person or over the phone.

## **Differences between online ratings and rating sticker displayed**

There may be temporary differences between the rating displayed at a business and online rating for which there are valid reasons, such as:

- the business has appealed its latest rating and is awaiting the result
- the local authority is in the process of uploading the new rating to our website

Even if a business achieves the top rating there can be a short delay while the local authority updates the website. Local authorities upload ratings at least every 28 days. If you cannot find a rating for business then you will need to contact the local authority responsible for inspecting the business.

You should also contact the local authority if you are concerned that a business is deliberately displaying a higher rating to the one on the website to suggest it has higher hygiene standards

than it actually does.

[Find your local authority food safety team.](#)

## **Businesses with poor ratings**

Businesses which are given low ratings must make urgent or major improvements to hygiene standards. The local authority food safety officer has several enforcement options available as well as giving advice and guidance to make sure these improvements are made.

The food safety officer will also tell the business how quickly these improvements must be made and this will depend on the type of issue that needs to be addressed.

If the officer finds that a business's hygiene standards are very poor and there is an imminent risk to public health, when food may be unsafe to eat, the officer must act to ensure consumers are protected. This could result in stopping part of the business or closing it down completely until it is safe to recommence.

## **Frequency of inspections**

A new rating is given each time a business is inspected by a food safety officer from the business's local authority.

Each local authority plans a programme of inspections every year. The frequency of inspections depends on the potential risk to public health.

The assessment takes account of the following factors:

- type of food that is handled
- the number and type of customers, for example vulnerable groups
- types of processes carried out before the food is sold or served
- hygiene standards seen on the day of the last inspection

Businesses that pose a higher risk are inspected more often than businesses that pose a lower risk, for example a small retailer selling a range of prepacked foods that only need to be refrigerated. The time between inspections varies from six months for the highest risk businesses to two years for lower risk businesses. For some very low risk businesses, the interval between inspections may be longer than two years, however there may be some exceptions to this.

In between inspections, local authorities may also monitor businesses in other ways to ensure they are maintaining hygiene standards. If these checks reveal anything that might indicate that hygiene standards have deteriorated, the officer will carry out an inspection and the business will get a new rating.

If the local authority receives a complaint or new information about a business that they are not due to inspect, and this suggests hygiene standards are not being maintained, the local authority will investigate and may inspect the business and give it a new hygiene rating.