Starting your food business safely

This page provides details on the requirements you must consider when starting a food business. Please read all the pages in this guide to ensure you have the information you need to run your food business.

There are several requirements you need to consider when starting a food business. These are:

Risk assessment

When starting a food business, you should carry out a risk assessment. The Health and Safety Executive has issued guidance on how to carry out a risk assessment and what to include.

Food businesses must use Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) procedures or a HACCP-based Food Safety Management System such as the Safer Food Better Business Guide .

The packs contain information on:

- personal hygiene
- pest control
- cross-contamination
- cleaning

Food hygiene

Good food hygiene is essential to make sure that the food you serve is safe to eat. When you are setting up a food business, you need to introduce ways of working that will help you ensure hygiene standards are right from the start.

The four main areas to remember for good food hygiene are the 4Cs:

- cleaning
- cooking
- chilling
- cross-contamination

Food hygiene training

Wherever food is served, it is important to demonstrate the highest standards of food preparation, handling, storage and serving. You will need to demonstrate that you have been adequately trained in food hygiene.

It is not compulsory for you to have a food hygiene certificate, but if you are looking to start a food business, we recommend that you pursue a food hygiene qualification to improve your knowledge.

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health provides guidance on the different levels of food hygiene certificate available. Other accredited training providers are available. Your local authority will be able to advise on which course is most suitable for your needs.

Allergen management

Food businesses are required by law to provide allergen information and follow labelling rules.

The law says that you must:

- provide allergen information to your customers
- handle and manage food allergens effectively in food preparation

You need to tell customers if any food you provide contains any of the 14 allergens that are required to be declared as allergens by food law.

This also applies to any additives, or any other items present in the final product, such as garnishes or cake decorations.

There are a number of ways in which allergen information can be provided to your customers.

Our allergen guidance for food businesses will help you to decide which is the best method for your business.

You can take steps to provide allergen-safe meals by:

- cleaning utensils before each use
- regularly washing hands thoroughly
- storing ingredients and prepared foods separately
- labelling takeaway meals clearly

It is important for food businesses to take steps to avoid cross-contamination in food preparation.

This protects customers with a food allergy. We have further guidance available on how to provide allergen information in food delivery.

We provide free online food allergy training which can be used to learn more about managing allergens in a kitchen, as well as how to cater for customers with food allergies.

Traceability

Traceability rules help keep track of food in the supply chain. They ensure that efficient and accurate withdrawals and recalls of unsafe foods from the market can be made in the event of any food safety problems.

You must keep records of:

- all the suppliers that provide you with food or any food ingredients
- any businesses you supply with food or food ingredients

All your records need to be kept up-to-date and always be available for inspections

Specific details of what you should include in your traceability records can be found in managing food safety.

Avoiding food crime

When sourcing ingredients, only purchase food from reputable suppliers. Ensure that you are fully aware of where the food has come from.

Be vigilant when approached by businesses you have not previously had dealings with. Determine where the food has originated from before purchasing anything.

Check whether the price is in line with the current market price. Prices of products fluctuate, but be wary if suppliers are offering products at a lower price than usual.

Find out more on food crime in our Food crime - guidance for businesses.

You can report suspected food crime to the National Food Crime Unit.

Health and safety

If you have five or more employees, you must have a written health and safety policy that describes the arrangements in place.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has developed H&S ABC – An easy guide to health & safety to help small and medium-sized businesses understand health and safety.

FSA Explains

Starting your food business safely checklist

Carry out a risk assessment

You should carry out a risk assessment and have a safety procedure in place for your food business.

Provide staff with food hygiene training

You will need to demonstrate that you have been adequately trained in food hygiene.

Ensure you are complying with allergy law

Food businesses are required by law to provide allergen information and follow labelling rules.

Ensure you have adequate traceability records

Specific details of what you should include in your traceability records can be found in managing food safety.

Avoid food crime

Read our Food crime - guidance for businesses. You can report suspected food crime to the National Food Crime Unit.

Ensure you have the correct health and safety procedures in place

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has developed H&S ABC – An easy guide to health & safety.

Was the information on this page helpful? Give us your feedback.