

Starting a food business

Register a food business

How to register a new and existing food business.

Registering

When you start a new food business or take over an existing business, you must [register your food business](#) with the local authority.

You should do this at least 28 days before opening. Registration of your food business is free and can't be refused. If you are already trading and have not registered, you need to do so as soon as possible.

Exceptions

Food businesses that make, prepare or handle meat, fish, egg or dairy products for supply to other businesses may require approval by a local authority and not registration. If you are unsure whether you need approval, check [Applying for approval of a food establishment guidance](#) or contact your [local authority](#).

Who needs to register

Registration will apply to all types of food businesses that serve customers directly, including:

- restaurants, cafes and takeaways
- catering businesses run from home, B&Bs, mobile catering and temporary businesses
- marquees, food stalls, food pop ups and food vans
- nurseries, schools and care homes
- distance selling, mail order and food delivery including online

You will need to register your food business if you:

- sell food
- cook food
- store or handle food
- prepare food
- distribute food

Companies involved with food distribution or food supply that operate from an office should also register as food businesses. This applies even if no food is kept at the premises.

[Register your food business](#)

Registering as a childminder

If you provide food with your childminding business in England, the details you provide to [Ofsted](#) will also be used to register you as a food business with your local authority. You will not have to register separately.

[Contact your local council](#) to apply for registration as a childminder if you provide food with your childminding business in Wales.

[Contact your local council](#) to apply for registration as a childminder if you provide food with your childminding business in Northern Ireland.

Volunteers and charity organisations

If you handle, prepare, store and serve food occasionally and on a small scale, you do not need to register.

You may need to register with your [local authority](#) as a food business if you provide food on a regular and organised basis. Registration still applies if you handle food regularly even if you are a not-for-profit organisation such as a food bank. There is further [guidance on providing food in a village hall or other community setting](#).

Food hygiene rating scheme

Once registered, you may be inspected by your local authority. Registering your business early and getting advice and guidance helps you prepare for inspections. Preparing thoroughly for inspection means your food business has the best chance of getting a top 5 rating under the [Food Hygiene Rating Scheme](#).

Businesses say displaying a high rating has helped them win more customers - we don't want you to miss out!

Updating your business details

You must:

- make sure your local authority always has up-to-date information about your premises
- tell your local authority if you are planning to make any significant changes to your business, including closure

If you operate more than one premises, you need to register each of them with the local authority in which they are located.

[Update your food business details](#)

If you want to make changes to your premises, you should tell your local authority as:

- you might need [planning permission](#)
- you will need to pay [business rates](#) on most premises

Setting up a food business

How to choose the right premises and what facilities you need to provide in your food business. Includes advice on health and safety and fire safety.

Choosing the right premises

The premises you choose for your business must:

- comply with the necessary regulations
- allow you to prepare food safely

You must keep your premises clean and maintained in good repair and condition. Your premises must allow you to follow good [food hygiene](#) practices, including protection against [contamination](#) and pest control.

When you are choosing new premises, or making changes to premises, it's a good idea to ask your local authority for advice.

The following rules apply to your whole premises, not just the areas used for preparing food.

Handwashing facilities and toilets

You must have enough washbasins for staff to wash their hands with hot and cold running water and materials for [cleaning hands](#) and drying them hygienically.

Changing facilities

You must provide adequate facilities for staff to change their clothes, where necessary.

Other requirements

Your premises must also have adequate ventilation, lighting and drainage.

Food preparation areas

The following rules apply to rooms where food is prepared.

Floors and walls

Floors and walls must be:

- maintained in a good condition
- easy to clean
- disinfected
- smooth, hard-wearing, washable and in a good state of repair

Ceilings

Ceilings should be:

- in good condition
- easy to clean to prevent dirt from building up

- free from condensation and mould
- free from flaking paint or plaster

Windows and doors

Windows and any other openings (such as doors) must be constructed in a way that prevents dirt from building up. If they open to the outside, they must be fitted with insect-proof screens that can be easily removed for cleaning.

Doors must be easy to:

- clean
- disinfect

Surfaces

Surfaces (including surfaces of equipment) in areas where food is handled, particularly those that are touched by food, must be:

- maintained in a good condition
- easy to clean
- disinfected

Facilities for cleaning equipment

Your premises must have adequate facilities for cleaning, disinfecting and storing utensils, including equipment. The facilities must have an adequate supply of hot and cold water.

Facilities for washing food

Separate sinks must be provided, where necessary, for washing food and cleaning equipment in food preparation areas.

Every sink must have an adequate supply of hot and cold water for washing food and be of drinking quality. These facilities must be kept clean and be disinfected.

Equipment

All items, fittings and equipment that food touches must be:

- kept in good order, repair and condition
- cleaned effectively and be disinfected frequently enough to avoid any risk of [contamination](#)

You can find more information on [maintenance](#) in our Safer food, better business for caterers pack.

Food waste

You must have adequate facilities for storing and disposing of food. You must [remove food waste and other rubbish](#) from rooms containing food as quickly as possible to avoid it building up and attracting pests.

The three main groups of pests that are encountered in food businesses are:

- rodents - rats and mice
- insects - cockroaches, beetles, ants and flies
- birds - pigeons etc

You can find more information on [pest control](#) in our Safer food, better business for caterers pack.

Food safety coaching video – Pest control

What to look out for and what to do to keep pests out of your business.

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 an [H&S ABC – An easy guide to health & safety](#) to help small and medium sized businesses understand health and safety.

If you're in Northern Ireland, contact the [Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland](#).

Fire safety

You must carry out a fire risk assessment at your premises and take fire safety precautions to help protect you, your staff and customers. The type of precautions you need to have will depend on the outcome of the fire risk assessment of the premises.

If you are planning to adapt your premises, it is a good idea to get fire safety advice before you start the work. You can get advice from your [local fire authority](#).

For more information, see the [fire and explosion pages](#) of the Health and Safety Executive website.

Get help and support

Your business can get advice on:

- [tax](#)
- [writing a business plan](#)
- [finance](#)
- [business premises and business rates](#)

You may have other responsibilities depending on what your food business does.

Check if you need:

- [licences or permits](#), for example to sell food or to trade in the street
- [insurance](#)

There are also rules you must follow if you're:

- [selling food online](#)
- [importing and exporting food](#)
- [storing or using personal information](#) - this applies to information kept on staff, customers

and account holders

[GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk), provides free business advice and support for starting a business. You can also find free support, advice and sources of finance through your [local 'growth hub'](#).

[Business Wales](#) is a free service that provides impartial, independent support and advice to people starting, running and growing a business in Wales.

nibusinessinfo.co.uk, a free service offered by Invest Northern Ireland, is the official online channel for business advice and support for starting a business.

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Managing food safety

How to manage food safety in your food business.

Food safety management is about complying with food hygiene and food standards. You must ensure that you have food safety management procedures in place. You also need to consider:

- the suppliers you use
- how you trace the food you buy, and the food you sell to other businesses
- how you transport food

Managing food safety procedures

You must put in place food safety management procedures based on the principles of [Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point](#) (HACCP).

HACCP is a system that helps you identify potential food hazards and introduce procedures to make sure those hazards are removed or reduced to an acceptable level.

These procedures will help you produce and sell food that is safe to eat, providing you:

- keep up-to-date documents and records relating to your procedures
- regularly review your procedures to ensure they reflect what you produce or how you work

To help you put your food safety management procedures in place, we provide information packs for small businesses.

[Safer Food, Better Business \(SFBB\) information packs](#)
[Food safety management guides for caterers and retailers in Northern Ireland](#)

Food safety procedures may not be necessary if processes in your business are very simple. In this case, you can comply with the legal requirement by following good hygiene practice. For more information, contact your [local authority](#).

Food hygiene

Food businesses and handlers must ensure that their practices minimise the risk of harm to the consumer. Part of complying with food safety is managing [food hygiene](#) and [food standards](#) to make sure that the food you serve is safe to eat.

Packaging and labelling

The law sets out what is required to be shown on food [packaging and labelling](#). Labelling is regulated to protect consumers who should have the correct information to make confident and informed food choices based on diet, allergies, personal taste or cost.

You can find additional information using the [Business Companion](#) website, which provides in-depth guides on what the law says on preparing and selling food, including hygiene, composition, labelling and packaging.

Food allergens

To keep your food allergic customers safe, you must follow the allergen information rules by:

- providing accurate allergen information
- handling and managing food allergens adequately in the kitchen

You can find our allergen advice in:

- [allergen guidance for industry](#)
- [allergen guidance for manufacturers](#)

Food additives

If you use an additive in food, you must:

- only use an [approved additive](#)
- only use it if it is [approved for use in that food](#)

Suppliers

It is important to use a reputable supplier to ensure the products you buy have been stored, processed and handled safely. When food is delivered, you must always check that:

- it is chilled and frozen food is cold enough
- the packaging is not damaged
- it is what you ordered

If you do not think that the food delivered has been handled safely or is poor quality, don't use it and contact your supplier immediately.

You can find more information on suppliers and contractors in our [Safer food, better business for caterers pack](#).

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
- the businesses you supply with food or food ingredients

The records should include:

- name and address of supplier
- name and address of business you are supplying
- type of and quantity of products
- dates of transaction and of delivery

You can also record:

- batch number
- invoices
- receipts of food products purchased

Often this information will be on the invoice.

All your records need to be kept up-to-date and be available for inspections at all times. They will be checked if there is a safety problem with food you have sold. The [General Food Law Regulation \(EC\) 178/2002](#) does not specify how long traceability records should be kept, although this may be required by sector specific legislation.

Food safety inspections and enforcement

Local authorities are responsible for enforcing food hygiene laws. Authorised officers have the right to enter and [inspect your premises](#) at any reasonable time without making an appointment. Authorised officers can take [enforcement action](#) to protect the public, such as seizing foods suspected to be unfit for human consumption.

Product withdrawal and recall

A food incident is where concerns about actual or suspected threats to the safety, quality or integrity of food and feed require intervention to protect consumers.

Withdrawal

When you know or suspect that food or feed you have supplied is either harmful to health, unfit for people to eat or does not meet legal requirements, you will need to withdraw it from sale.

Recall

The product could be recalled if it has already reached customers.

Customers should be informed to return or dispose of the product.

You must immediately tell your [local authority](#) if you need to withdraw or recall your products.

You can find more information on [product withdrawal and recall](#) in our Safer food, better business packs.

Training

If you are responsible for developing and maintaining a business's food safety management procedures, you must have had suitable training on food safety and hygiene to do this. Skills can be learned by:

- training while working
- self-study
- relevant previous experience.

You must make sure that any member of staff who handles food is trained in food hygiene and safety, including [allergens](#), before they start work.

It is a good idea to [keep a record of any training you or your staff have done](#), so you will be able to show this to authorised officers when they visit your premises.

- Our [SFBB information packs](#) can help to train you and your staff.
- We provide free online [Allergen training](#) and [Traceability training](#) for businesses.
- You can also get in touch with your [local authority](#) about food hygiene courses.

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Food hygiene for your business

Food hygiene requirements for your business.

Good food hygiene is essential to make sure that the food you serve is safe to eat. It helps prevent food poisoning.

When you are [setting up a food business](#), you need to introduce ways of working that will help you ensure good food hygiene is right from the start.

The 4Cs of food hygiene

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

- [Cleaning](#)
- [Cooking](#)
- [Chilling](#)
- [Cross-contamination](#)

You can use the 4Cs to prevent the most common food safety problems.

To manage food hygiene and safety procedures in your food business, you should

follow [Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point](#) (HACCP) principles.

Storing food safely

It is very important to store food properly to keep it safe, to protect it from harmful bacteria, chemicals and objects falling into food. You'll need to store different types of food by storing in:

- containers you keep in cupboards or on shelves - such as pasta, rice and flour
- a fridge
- a freezer

You can find more information on how to [Chill food correctly in your business](#).

Transporting food safely

When you [transport food](#), from your premises to another venue or the cash-and-carry to your premises, you must prevent it from becoming contaminated, for example with dirt or bacteria.

It is especially important to make sure that:

- food is transported in packaging or containers that protect it from contamination
- chilled and frozen foods are kept at the right [temperature](#) (some businesses use cool bags and boxes, or refrigerated vans)
- raw and ready-to-eat foods are kept apart

Staff training

By law, food business operators must ensure that food handlers receive the appropriate supervision and training in food hygiene, which is in-line with the area they work in and will enable them to handle food in the safest way. In the UK, food handlers don't have to hold a food hygiene certificate to prepare or sell food.

The skills taught in official training programmes can also be learned by:

- training on-the-job
- self-study
- relevant prior experience

Personal hygiene

To keep food safe, it is essential for you and your staff to have high standards of [personal hygiene](#).

Personal hygiene covers:

- handwashing
- clothing
- fitness for work
- training

Inspections and food hygiene rating

Authorised officers from your local council will [inspect your premises](#) to check if your business is complying with food law and producing food that is safe to eat.

If you serve or supply food direct to the public, you may be covered by the [Food Hygiene Rating Scheme](#).

Your rating will be based on what is seen on the day of inspection and you may be given a hygiene rating from 5 to 0, based on the food hygiene standards found at the time.

Displaying the rating sticker is mandatory in Wales and Northern Ireland. It is voluntary in England. By putting it on display, you can show your customers how good your hygiene standards are.

Food industry guides

For more information of hygiene for your business, you can purchase and read our guides from The Stationery Office's website.

Making and selling sandwiches

- [Food Industry Guide to Good Hygiene Practice: Sandwich Bars and Similar Food Service Outlets](#)
- [Industry Guide to Good Hygiene Practice: Sandwich Manufacturing](#)

Retail business

- [Food Industry Guide to Good Hygiene Practice: Retail](#)
- [Best Practice Guidelines for the Production of Chilled Foods - Fourth Edition](#)

Other industry guides to aid your business

- [catering](#)
- [wholesale distributors](#)
- [whitefish processors](#)
- [vending and dispensing](#)
- [bottled water](#)
- [mail order food](#)
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[drinks and alcohol](#)

- [watercress](#)

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