



NATIONAL
**FOOD
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MONTH

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Restaurant Manager's Guide to **Passing a Health Inspection**





In this guide, we'll go over some common health inspection challenges, the basic policies, practices, and requirements managers must have in place before an inspection, and what managers can do to stay prepared.

Most Common Health Code Violations

Although health codes and violations vary by state and [region](#), the FDA reports these are the most common violations restaurant managers need to know about.

Time and Temperature

When inspecting an operation, a health inspector will sample the temperature of several time/temperature control for safety (TCS) foods, sometimes referred to as potentially hazardous foods (PHF). Violations are given out if any of these foods are at unsafe temperatures during the allotted amount of time.

TCS foods, including milk and dairy products, eggs, meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, and crustaceans, can become unsafe when kept at certain temperatures for a specific amount of time. As a rule of thumb, TCS food should never fall into what is known as the temperature danger zone, the temperature range between 41°F and 135°F (5°C and 57°C). These temperatures create the perfect environment for pathogens to grow on food surfaces.

Managers should ensure all food handlers follow critical time and temperature control procedures including, but not limited to:



Understanding which food items should be checked and how often



Recording temperatures regularly and keeping a written record of when the temperatures were taken



Putting thermometer stems or probes into the thickest part of the food



Cleaning and sanitizing and calibrating thermometers regularly



Limiting the time food spends in the temperature danger zone (e.g., limiting the amount of food that can be removed from a cooler when prepping)



Following procedures for when time and temperature standards are not met

Food Storage

Proper food storage is vital for keeping food safe and preventing cross-contamination. During an inspection, the inspector will look for proper food storage practices like labeling foods with use-by dates, using proper food-grade storage containers, and checking to see if ready-to-eat food has been stored above raw food. Common violations occur when raw and ready-to-eat foods are being stored improperly.

Cross-contamination can occur when one food item touches or drips onto another food item during storage. For this reason, it's best to separate all raw and ready-to-eat food items into their own designated areas. If this isn't possible, use the following top-to-bottom order when storing food:

- 1 Ready-to-eat food
- 2 Seafood
- 3 Whole cuts of beef and pork
- 4 Ground meat and ground fish
- 5 Whole and ground poultry

Personal Hygiene

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The inspector will look for signs of illness among your staff, including persistent sneezing, coughing, or a runny nose that is associated with discharges from the eyes, nose, or mouth. Managers must also watch for these signs and exclude employees who have the following symptoms: vomiting, diarrhea, or jaundice (a yellowing of the skin or eyes). Follow these guidelines for handling sick employees:



Require staff to report illnesses before they come to work and let you know immediately if they get sick while working.



Send employees home immediately if they feel sick and ensure they STAY HOME until fully recovered or cleared for work by a doctor.



Discard all food items touched by sick employees and clean and sanitize contact surfaces.

Must-Have Policies and Procedures

While specific requirements vary from region to region, there are some basic food safety policies and procedures that are generally required to pass a health inspection. Here is a list of basic restaurant requirements:

Food Temperature Control

- Temperature logs are kept for receiving, storing, cooking, and holding food
- Cooked food is being checked to ensure it has reached the required minimum internal temperature:
- Food is being received, stored, and prepped at temperatures outside of the temperature danger zone (41°F to 135°F)
- Hot-held TCS food is at 135°F or higher
- Cold-held TCS food is at 41°F or lower.
- Food is being cooled from 135°F to 70°F within 2 hours, and then from 70°F to 41°F or lower in the next four hours
- Food is being reheated for hot holding to 165°F for 15 seconds within 2 hours
- Thermometers are calibrated regularly
- Food is being stored at the proper temperature
- Store TCS food at an internal temperature of 41°F or lower. Store frozen food at temperatures that will keep it frozen. Food is being properly thawed under refrigeration, submerged under cold running water, in the microwave (if cooked immediately afterwards), or as a part of the cooking process





Food Preparation

- Food handlers are aware and up to date on potential hazards and cross-contamination prevention
- Produce is being washed before cutting it, cooking it, or combining it with other ingredients. Food is being checked for naturally occurring physical hazards before being served (e.g., bones, seeds)
- Bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food is being prevented by using single-use gloves or utensils when handling it
- Designated equipment is being used (e.g., cutting boards and utensils) when preparing different foods
- Protocols are in place if contamination or suspected contamination occurs

Food Storage

- Food is labeled with a common name and date marked with a use-by date
- Food is being stored away from walls and at least six inches (15cm) off the floor
- Raw and ready-to-eat foods are being stored separately OR in the following order from top to bottom:
 - Food is being stored in food-grade containers
 - Food is stored in first-in, first-out (FIFO) order
- Throw out food that:
 - Is in a container or package that is not marked with the day or date by which it should be sold, eaten, or thrown out.
 - Is incorrectly marked with a day or date that exceeds a safe time temperature combination (e.g., a date beyond seven storage days).

Employee Hygiene

- Employees wash their hands before preparing food or working with clean equipment and utensils, before putting on single-use gloves and after any of these activities:
 - Using the restroom.
 - Touching hair, face, or body.
 - Handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood (before and after).
 - Touching clothing or aprons.
 - Taking out garbage.
 - Sneezing, coughing, or using a tissue.
 - Handling chemicals that can make food unsafe.
 - Clearing tables or busing dirty dishes.
 - Handling money.
- Employees wash their hands with soap and warm water for at least twenty seconds.
- Hand washing signs are posted in the bathroom and in sanitation stations.
- Employees are wearing single-use gloves and changing them when required when handling ready-to-eat foods.
- Employees wear clean uniforms, shower regularly, keep fingernails clean, remove jewelry from hands and arms, and cover wounds properly.
- Employees are eating, drinking, smoking, and chewing gum or tobacco in designated places only.



Facility Setup

- Your restaurant has separate sinks for handwashing, mop washing, and dishwashing.
- Faucets are at an adequate height above the sink to prevent backflow.
- All sinks drain properly.
- Floor drains are clean and in good working order.
- Plumbing is in good repair and does not leak.
- Cross-connection devices (vacuum breakers, backflow preventers) are working.
- There is adequate, covered lighting throughout.
- Bathrooms are in good working order, clean, and only stocked with bathroom necessities (toilet paper, paper towels, soap).
- There is adequate ventilation throughout.

Cleaning and Sanitation

- Food-contact surfaces are smooth, durable, easy to clean, and cleaned according to requirements.
- Equipment is clean, functioning, and meets ANSI standards.
- Eating utensils are cleaned and sanitized after each use using a three-compartment sink or commercial dishwashing machine.
- Chemicals and cleaning supplies are kept away from food surfaces when in use.
- Cleaners are completely rinsed from equipment surfaces after cleaning.
- Chemicals are properly labeled, stored in a separate area from food storage, and disposed of properly.
- Employees regularly remove trash from prep areas.
- Trash cans are regularly cleaned.

Pest Control

- Holes and cracks in walls are sealed.
- Dumpsters are kept on a level surface, covered, and an adequate distance from the restaurant.
- Trash cans are covered when not in use.
- There are no visible signs of droppings, nests, or pest damage.

Legal

- All food handlers have documented food safety training.
- Proper legal signage is posted.
- All suspected foodborne illness outbreaks have been reported to the health department.



Download our self-inspection checklist to see how prepared your restaurant is for an inspection.





Stay Prepared

Treat every day as a possible inspection day. This means regularly monitoring food temperatures and checking over temperature logs. It also means checking whether food handlers are changing gloves when necessary and making sure food is stored in first-in, first-out order.

Staying prepared for a health inspection also requires you to make sure employees are adequately trained and up to date on food safety best practices. Empowering employees with training materials encourages good habits. Place posters, quick guides, and references around food prep, sanitation, and bathroom areas so employees can take the guesswork out of basic food safety procedures.

For added preparation, implement a **food safety training or certificate program**. Training programs are an extra cost, but the knowledge and skills gained by employees are a priceless benefit that will lead to fewer food safety incidents and added savings.

Put Your Best Foot Forward



With diligence and dedication to food safety, you should have no problem passing your next health inspection with flying colors. And remember, violations happen. Don't fret much about minor violations—address them as soon as possible and move forward stronger and safer.

If you're interested in empowering your staff with food safety training or certification, ServSafe's trusted training and certification programs are the preferred solution. Our programs, including ServSafe Manager and ServSafe Food Handler, were developed by industry experts, and are designed to protect customers, employees, and businesses.

Get in touch with
our ServSafe team
to get started.

Visit foodsafetyfocus.com for more
information and resources for building a
food safety culture.