



Food safety programs for caterers

This fact sheet provides general information on food safety programs for food businesses licensed under the *Food Act 2006* (the Act) conducting catering.

Do I need a food safety program?

Under the Act, certain licensable food businesses in Queensland must have a food safety program accredited by their local government. There are significant penalties for not having an accredited food safety program.

The licensee of a food business must have an accredited food safety program if:

- the food business involves off-site catering.
- the primary activity of the food business is on-site catering at the premises stated in the licence.
- the primary activity of the food business is on-site catering at part of the premises stated in the licence.

Off-site catering

Off-site catering, in relation to a food business, means serving potentially hazardous food at a place other than the principal place of business for the food business.

Off-site catering does not include:

- merely delivering food under an arrangement with or on the order of a consumer, such as delivering pizzas from a takeaway pizza shop, or
- the sale of food from mobile premises or temporary premises, such as the sale of ice-creams from a mobile ice-cream van.

Examples:

A spit-roast catering company partially prepares food at one place (their principal place of business), then finishes preparations and serves potentially hazardous food at another place (such as in a local park, on a beach or in a hired hall).

A food safety program is required

A charter boat company purchases sandwiches with potentially hazardous fillings from a local café for clients to consume on the boat.

No food safety program is required

A charter boat company prepares food, including potentially hazardous foods such as chicken, cold meat and salads, in a licensed fixed premises (their principal place of business). The charter boat company transports and then serves the food as a buffet for lunch (either on the boat or on land at a designated or random stop).

A food safety program is required

A catering company prepares potentially hazardous food in a licensed mobile premises (their principal place of business). The catering company transports and then serves the food in tents (not licensed temporary premises) located at various sites away from the licensed mobile premises, such as with a film crew.

A food safety program is required

A catering company prepares potentially hazardous food in a licensed mobile premises and serves the food in a tent immediately adjacent to the licensed mobile premises.

No food safety program is required

A catering company prepares potentially hazardous food in a licensed fixed premises. The catering company transports and then serves the food in a licensed temporary premises.

No food safety program is required

On-site catering

On-site catering, in relation to a food business, means preparing and serving potentially hazardous food, to all consumers of the food at the premises from which the business is carried on, under an agreement under which the food is:

- of a predetermined type (this may be product specific or include a particular type of food), and
- for a predetermined number of persons (this includes a group of people attending a particular event), and
- served at a predetermined time (this may include a specific day or days and normally specify a time), and
- for a predetermined cost (the cost is agreed prior to the preparation and service of the food).

On-site catering does not include:

- preparing and serving food at a restaurant, café or similar food business that involves the preparation and service of food on the order of a person for immediate consumption by the person, or
- merely preparing and displaying food for self service by consumers, such as a buffet at a restaurant.

Examples:

Provision of a variety of hot, sit down meals for between 30 and 40 people to be available between 12pm and 2:30pm Monday and Tuesday at a total cost of \$700.

On site catering

Provision of a 3 course meal consisting of soup for entrée, an alternate drop main and cake for desert for 90 people commencing at 6:30pm on Saturday at a cost of \$59 per head.

On site catering

Provision of a selection of seasonal salads, cold meats and bread rolls for 100 people at 1:00pm Thursday at a cost of \$27 a head.

On site catering

On-site catering where the primary activity of the food business is on-site catering at the premises stated in the licence.

Examples:

A function hall prepares and serves potentially hazardous food for functions including conferences, weddings, birthday parties and reunions where food is ordered for an agreed cost prior to the function for a specific number of people to be served at a set time.

A food safety program is required

A function centre prepares and serves potentially hazardous food, predominantly for wedding receptions, but also has a small restaurant where prospective patrons can dine or return for an anniversary dinner. The primary activity is catering for functions.

A food safety program is required

A restaurant occasionally caters for groups. Catering is not the primary activity of the food business.

No food safety program is required

On-site catering where the primary activity of the food business is on-site catering at part of the premises stated in the licence.

In the situation where on-site catering is the primary activity at part of the premises, only those businesses that use a part of their food business to cater to 200 or more people on 12 or more occasions in any 12 month period are required to have a food safety program.

Examples:

A restaurant occasionally divides its seating area and provides catering in one half (part of the premises). Catering in part of the premises is provided for a maximum of 100 people every two months (on average).

No food safety program is required

A café has an additional room with extra seating. The room is used primarily for overflow seating from the main dining area.

No food safety program is required

A restaurant in a hotel has an additional dining room with extra seating. The room is used primarily for catered functions separate to the remainder of the business. Catering is provided on average to 250-300 people each fortnight.

A food safety program is required

A club hosts conferences monthly in their upstairs dining area for 250 people. Serving food is not a focus of the conference; however attendees may order food from an a la carte menu.

No food safety program is required

What is a food safety program?

A food safety program is a documented system that identifies the food safety hazards in the handling of food in a food business and details the ways the hazards will be controlled in that business.

Why develop a food safety program?

The introduction of food safety programs for certain sectors of the food industry was part of the national food reform process which aimed to reduce the incidence of food borne illness, reduce the regulatory burden on the food industry and provide consistent food regulation and standards across Australia.

The National Risk Validation Report published in 2002 identified food service in catering operations, as one of five high risk industry sectors in which food safety programs would reduce the incidence of food-borne illness.

What are the benefits of a food safety program?

A food safety program is a documented system for managing parameters linked to food safety. If developed and followed properly, a food safety program helps to ensure food for sale is safe. A food safety program can also help a food business manage their operations better through improved record keeping and cost control. An appropriate and well implemented food safety program can also help a food business demonstrate that all due diligence was exercised in the preparation and sale of food.

What must a food safety program contain?

A food safety program must:

- systematically identify the food safety hazards that are reasonably likely to occur in food handling operations of the food business, and
- identify where, in a food handling operation of the food business, each hazard identified can be controlled and the means of control, and
- provide for the systematic monitoring of the means of control, and
- provide for appropriate corrective action to be taken when a hazard identified is not under control, and
- provide for the regular review of the program to ensure it is appropriate for the food business, and
- provide for the keeping of appropriate records for the food business, including records about action taken to ensure the business is carried on in compliance with the program, and
- contain other information, relating to the control of food safety hazards, prescribed under a regulation.

How do I develop a food safety program?

There are various food safety program templates available to help food businesses develop a food safety program that is tailored to the food business. The Department of Health has released a number of food safety program templates that are available at www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety. However, a food business is able to use any food safety program template to develop a food safety program, provided the completed program meets the criteria outlined above.

How do I get my food safety program accredited?

The local government that issues a food business's licence is responsible for accrediting the food safety program for the food business. Contact details for local governments can be found in the White Pages or at www.dlgp.qld.gov.au/local-government-directory.html.

What happens after my food safety program is accredited?

The licensee of a food business with an accredited food safety program must comply with the program in carrying on the food business.

A copy of the accredited food safety program must be kept at the premises of the food business and be kept available for inspection by employees in the food business.

The first compliance audit must be conducted by an auditor approved under the Act within six months of accreditation of the food safety program.

Audits must then be undertaken at the frequency specified by the local government that accredited the food safety program.

How do I find an auditor?

The Department of Health keeps a register of auditors approved under the Act at www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety. The register contains the name and contact details of the auditor, the conditions of the auditor's approval and the term of the approval.

For further information on finding and selecting an auditor, refer to Food Safety Fact Sheet 25 – *Choosing an approved auditor*.

If you have any questions or concerns about an auditor, contact Food Safety Standards and Regulation on phone (07) 3328 9310 or email foodsafety@health.qld.gov.au.

What happens after an audit?

Within 14 days after completing an audit, an auditor is required to provide a copy of the audit report to the food business and the local government that accredited the food safety program. The auditor will identify any non-compliances (instances where the food business does not comply with the accredited food safety program or the food safety standards).

If non-compliances are very serious and could result in unsafe food, the auditor is required to refer the issue to the local government that accredited the food safety program within 24 hours. The local government may take further action.

For further information

The Department of Health has a variety of fact sheets with detailed information on food safety. Fact sheets can be accessed from the Queensland Health website at www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety.

If you have any further questions relating to whether you are a licensable food business or if the food safety program provisions relate to your food business, contact the local government for the area where your food business is located. Contact details can be found in the White Pages or at www.dlgp.qld.gov.au/local-government-directory.html.

