

Food hygiene inspections

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Why are food businesses inspected? [\[Back to contents\]](#)

The law requires businesses, which produce or prepare food for the public, to be inspected to make sure that the food and drink they sell is safe to eat. The law also requires Southampton City Council to ensure that food businesses within the city are inspected.

The inspector will make sure that the business is following the food safety laws which apply to it.

Who inspects food businesses? [\[Back to contents\]](#)

The inspector is an environmental health officer or an environmental health technical officer employed by Southampton City Council. The inspector has the required qualifications and experience to inspect the food business.

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The inspector may come on a routine inspection, or they might visit because of a complaint or to take samples. The frequency of the routine inspection depends on the type of business, its customers and its previous record. Some premises are inspected every six months, others are visited less often. Businesses with effective food safety management systems are inspected less frequently than those without adequate procedures.

The inspector will try to visit when food is being prepared. This allows the inspector to see whether food is being prepared hygienically. The law gives the inspector the right to enter and inspect food premises at 'all reasonable times'. This usually means when the premises is open for business, or when staff are preparing food. The inspector does not have to make an appointment and will usually arrive without giving notice. Inspectors may decide to visit premises early in the morning, in the evening or at weekends. Inspecting premises at these times allows the inspector to understand how the business operates.

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When the inspector arrives at the premises, they will introduce themselves and they will show their identification. The inspector will check the activities of the business to identify potential 'hazards'; find out how these hazards are controlled; and ensure that food is safe to eat. The inspector will make sure that the premises meet the legal requirements and are being kept clean. The inspector will talk to people working at the premises to find out how they handle food and to check that they are properly trained in food hygiene.

At the end of the inspection, the inspector will give feedback to the proprietor or the manager. The inspector will discuss any action that is needed to comply with the law or may give advice on good hygiene practice.

The inspector will send the proprietor a report confirming the outcome of the inspection. This report will normally be sent within seven days of the inspection. If action is required to comply with the law, the letter will identify the law which is being broken; give the reason for the action to be taken; detail the action required, and give a reasonable amount of time for the action to be taken. The inspector may also identify health and safety problems or environmental protection issues. These will be discussed at the end of the inspection and may be detailed in the letter sent following the inspection.

Southampton City Council participates in the national food hygiene rating system. This scheme provides consumers with information about the hygiene standards in food businesses at the time they were last inspected. Food premises are given one of the following ratings after each inspection, which is published on the website www.food.gov.uk/ratings:

Food hygiene rating	Description
5	Very good
4	Good
3	Generally satisfactory
2	Improvement necessary
1	Major improvement necessary
0	Urgent improvement necessary

The rating is based on the inspector's assessment of:

- **Compliance with food hygiene and safety procedures**: how hygienically food is handled – how it is prepared, cooked, cooled, stored and what measures are taken to prevent food being contaminated with bacteria;
- **Compliance with structural compliance**: the condition of the structure of the premises, including cleanliness, layout, lighting, ventilation, equipment and other facilities etc;
- **Confidence in management and control procedures**: how you manage and record what you do to make sure food is safe.

What other action can the inspector take? [\[Back to contents\]](#)

The inspector can take enforcement action to protect the public if they think it is necessary. For example, they can:

- Take samples of food to test
- Detain or seize food
- Take photographs
- Inspect records
- Serve a hygiene improvement notice
- Serve an emergency prohibition notice, preventing a premises, a process or equipment from being used (the notice has to be confirmed in Court)
- Gather evidence for a prosecution

By law, the inspector must be given reasonable assistance and must not be obstructed or prevented from carrying out the inspection.

What happens if the food business operator disagrees with the inspector? [\[Back to contents\]](#)

If the food business operator does not agree with the action which the inspector has taken, or if feels that the action is unreasonable, they can contact the Food Safety Team Leader to see whether the problem can be resolved.

If the inspector has served an improvement notice, an appeal can be made to the Magistrate's Court. If the inspector has seized food, it must be condemned by a Justice of the Peace and the food business operator can attend the Court hearing.

What other information is available? [\[Back to contents\]](#)

The inspector can provide advice about food safety law and appropriate food hygiene training. Trade associations and independent consultancy services may also be able to provide information or advice. The [Food Standards Agency](#) website provides information about food safety.