

COMPLAINTS:

The FSP receives about 2800 consumer complaints every year. These complaints are received via the Department's website, after-hours call center, and calls to the FSP office during business hours. It would be difficult for the inspectors to be aware of everything happening in the 8500 permitted food facilities under the FSP's jurisdiction, so the program relies on the public to advise of unsafe conditions through the complaint system.

These complaints provide information and insight that is valuable in identifying significant problems that may occur between the routine inspections conducted by the program.

Sometimes the complaints are of an emergency nature, such as a flood, fire, or power outage or possibly a large food borne illness being reported. In the case of these types of complaints, every effort is made to respond the same day as the complaint is received. Protecting the public health by identifying and mitigating any serious conditions is always the priority.

When complaints are investigated, the identity of the complainant is kept confidential. This contact information is essential to conduct a complete investigation and to advise the complainant of the findings.

REVIEW OF FOOD FACILITY CONSTRUCTION PLANS:

All food facilities need a plan for successful operation. When plans involve construction, renovation or extensive alteration that the FSP Plan Review (PR) Section will need to review and approve the plans before any construction work begins. Sometimes the alterations to the kitchen seem minor, but changes in the food being prepared and served often involves the need for changes. It is much easier to change something on paper opposed to making changes after construction begins.

Business owners can save time and money by contacting the PR Section as early as possible. The ACHD Food Safety website provides a list of the steps needed to submit a plan. A complete plan includes a description of the location and type of facility, a drawing/layout of the kitchen and auxiliary spaces, the proposed menu, a list of commercial equipment and the completion of an application submitted with the required fee.

The PR Section also provides pre-operational inspections for these new and remodeled facilities after the construction has been completed. Operators need to contact the FSP providing at least a 10-day notice to allow for scheduling.

CERTIFICATION:

The FSP requires that all facilities have a certified Food Protection Manager on duty during their regular business hours. This person is trained and has knowledge of food safety practices essential to provide safe food to the consumer. The FSP offers courses for those working in the food industry to obtain this certification.

The training is intended for owners, managers and food service workers. Training topics include microbiology, causes of foodborne illnesses, proper food handling, cleaning and sanitization, facilities, and equipment. The training sessions are led by FSP inspectors who are certified trainers and exam proctors. Drawing on their experience, they are able to make the classroom instruction relevant and relatable.

Courses are offered in various locations throughout the county as a 2-day comprehensive course or as a 1-day recertification course. The 1 and 2-day courses include classroom instruction, a study manual, and exam.

For those whose certification has expired, it is recommended that the 2-day or 1-day recertification course be taken. However, the FSP offers the option of taking the exam only. The exam is usually given two times a month at the FSP's office. After passing the exam, the certification is awarded which is valid for 5 years.

PUBLIC OUTREACH:

The FSP receives requests throughout the year from the public, and other organizations, for program staff to provide food safety information, training or participate in community events. Topics include food safety tips, such as thawing and cooking Thanksgiving turkey, safe food handling practices for in-house training at a food facility, and how to open a new food business. Brownie the Burger has been sighted around town spreading the message about consuming hamburgers that are fully cooked! The FSP welcomes these opportunities to educate the public and answer questions about food safety.



Food Safety
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Food Safety Program

<https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Health-Department/Programs/Food-Safety/Food-Safety-Program.aspx>



Mission

The mission of the Allegheny County Health Department is to protect, promote, and preserve the health and well-being of all Allegheny County residents, particularly the most vulnerable.

In conjunction with that mission, the Food Safety Program (FSP) works to safeguard public health through the application of the principles of food safety, foodborne illness prevention, and environmental health in food facilities.

This is accomplished by:

- conducting food safety inspections
- investigating consumer complaints
- responding to emergency conditions
- offering training and testing to become a certified Food Protection Manager
- providing Plan Review services to those who want to open a food facility
- respond to inquiries from the public

The office may be reached at 412 578 – 8044, Monday to Friday, 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM and FoodSafety@alleghenycounty.us.

INSPECTIONS: There are approximately 8500 permanent food facilities and on average another 500 seasonal food facilities operating in Allegheny County. All of these facilities are inspected using **Article III, Food Safety Rules & Regulations**, as the primary tool to identify deficiencies and violations.

Inspections are unannounced and are intended to identify deficiencies in the food handling, food temperatures, equipment operation, employee hygiene, facility cleanliness, and other areas of the business that may pose a risk to the public. Depending upon the number and nature of the violations, a follow-up inspection may be scheduled or if serious and repeated issues are noted, immediate enforcement action may be taken. Any person offering consumables is subject to these regulations.

TYPES OF FACILITIES INSPECTED:

The Food Safety Program inspects a variety of food related businesses including:

- Full, limited service, and takeout restaurants
- Private clubs, afterhours social clubs, and caterers
- Grocery stores, bakeries, and corner markets
- The kitchens of schools, daycare centers, hospitals, boarding homes and nursing homes.

- Prepackaged food facilities to include retail chain stores and buyer's clubs
- Food warehouses, wholesale food distributors, and food processors
- The kitchen/food related portions of hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts
- Temporary food festivals, farmer's markets, mobile vendors

The inspections of all permitted food facilities are on the Department's website for public review. The reports will include current and previous years inspections, reinspections, and any other investigations conducted during that timeframe.

FREQUENCY OF INSPECTIONS:

The inspection frequency varies with the type and volume of food offered for sale, as well as the violations identified during a routine inspection.

- Highest priority: Schools that are full service and prepare all meals for the students are the highest priority and receive 2 initial comprehensive inspections during the school year. This is to satisfy the requirements of the USDA and due to the population served.
- High priority: Receive an initial comprehensive inspection every 6 months. This would include facilities that have been consistently cited for high/medium risk violations and/or have had enforcement action taken for failure to correct violations.
- Medium priority: Receive 1 initial comprehensive inspection during a 12-month period. This could apply to almost any food facility.
- Lowest priority: Receive 1 routine comprehensive inspection in a 24-month period. This would apply to facilities that have prepackaged foods which pose a very low risk.

TEMPORARY AND SEASONAL EVENTS:

During the year, the FSP conducts inspections at numerous temporary and seasonal events. Temporary permits are valid for 14 consecutive days or less and are issued for events such as art and music festivals. Seasonal permits are valid for six months and are intended for use at events such as farmer's markets. Many of these festivals are well attended therefore it is important that the FSP assess that the foods being prepared and offered to the Public are handled in a safe manner.

Organizers and participants of these festivals are required to submit applications prior to the event for each vendor who may be attending to assure minimum equipment and safeguards are in place to reduce the risk to the public.

ENFORCEMENT:

The FSP employs a placarding system to identify the status of all permanent food facilities in Allegheny County. They are color coded and should be readily visible on a door or window beside a main entry to the facility. Information relating to Consumer Alerts and Closures, as well as other Administrative and Enforcement Actions is detailed for public information.

- **GREEN:** Inspected and Permitted. This is the most common placard. It indicates the facility has been inspected and meets the minimum requirements to operate safely and has mitigated any high or medium risk violations noted during the routine inspection.



- **YELLOW:** Consumer Alert. This placard indicates there are serious violations, that frequently have been identified on previous inspections, which could pose a risk to the public. A facility with this placarding status has 10 days to correct the violations to be upgraded to the Green placard. Failure to make corrections within 10 days could result in closure or additional enforcement action.



- **RED:** Closed. This placard is reserved for serious violations that have remained uncorrected and imminent hazards to public health, such as a sewage back-up, or failure to correct violations after repeated notice. The operator would need to send a written request for an inspection prior to reopening.



FOOD SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

The Food Safety Advisory Committee is comprised of a diverse group of food facility owners and operators representing a cross section of the facilities regulated by the FSP, as well as Public interest, and academia. Members of the FSP also participate on a regular basis. The group meets 3 to 4 times a year to discuss current issues, trends, and other food related topics that may present challenges to the industry and the FSP's regulatory perspective.