

Preparing for Restaurant Health Inspections

Ensuring that your restaurant is clean and serves fresh, safe food to patrons is your greatest responsibility; health inspections are a way for you to learn how to best uphold this responsibility. To observe you when you are running operations as you normally would, inspectors often make impromptu inspections. Many inspections are performed during the frenzy of mealtimes so inspectors can have an accurate view of how food is regularly prepared at your facility. There are several ways you can effectively prepare your restaurant to make the best of these inspections.

Before the Inspection

Being prepared for a health inspection means understanding your city and state's public health codes as you are preparing the restaurant to open for customers and at all times during operation. Here are some ways to become familiar with the codes with which you must comply:

- Consider joining your state's restaurant association.
- Check your state's online resources regarding food-safety rules.
- Refer to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Model Food Code. This set of guidelines provides a list of best practices for keeping restaurants free from foodborne

illnesses, and serves as a guide for the development of state and local regulations.

- Perform regular self-inspections of your operations. Use the same form your health department does (or a similar one) and put yourself in the inspector's role. Establish a regular time-frame in which you will perform these inspections. The following are some

Consider health inspectors an ally in preventing unsafe practices in the workplace that could increase your potential risks.

typical considerations:

- How are foods cooked, cooled and reheated?
- How often and in what way are temperatures recorded? Are thermometers functional?
- How are potentially hazardous raw foods prepared and served?
- How do you handle leftovers?
- What is your food labeling process?

Preparing for Restaurant Health Inspections

- Where and how is food washed and prepped?
- What is your hand washing and glove use policy?
- When, how and by whom is equipment cleaned and sanitized?
- What is the process for training new employees?
- Establish priorities based on the characteristics of your facility or problem areas. For example, if you decide to focus on food temperature, instruct employees to take the temperature of products when they arrive, when they are stored and when they are served.

While Undergoing the Inspection

When undergoing a health inspection, it is important to maintain a cooperative, professional and open attitude. Establishing a good relationship with local health inspectors is fundamental:

- Give the inspector a cordial greeting. Politely ask to see credentials.
- Tour with the health inspector. Think of the inspector as an outside auditor, and the inspection as an opportunity to prevent foodborne illness at your operation.
- If you are not able to tour with the health inspector, assign a manager or staff member to take your place.
- Never argue or be defensive with an inspector.
- Never offer favors or food to an inspector.

- If you are written up for any violations, make sure you understand what they are and how to correct them. Ask the health inspector to suggest a way to fix the problem.

Immediately After the Inspection

The information gained from your inspector is extremely valuable. It is important to maximize the knowledge you gain during inspections by relaying it to staff and incorporating it into your day-to-day activities:

- Hold a 10-minute briefing session with kitchen staff after the inspection, emphasizing the importance of maintaining health standards. Add your own management guidelines to make your argument more authoritative.
- If you have staff for whom English is a second language, ask a bilingual staff member to interpret for you during these briefings.
- Make staff participants in the conversation. Ask for questions and suggestions.
- Continue to perform regular self-inspections, taking into account the inspector's advice or findings.

Proper food preparation is not a matter of complying with the law—it also means avoiding disastrous foodborne illness originating at your facility. Consider health inspectors an ally in preventing unsafe practices in the workplace that could heighten your risk.

For more risk management information, contact the insurance professionals at Peabody Insurance Agency.