

Most Commonly Asked Questions and Answers ABOUT THE FOOD SAFETY CERTIFICATE

Question 1: Why is this Food Safety Certificate requirement necessary?

Each year hundreds of people in Philadelphia may develop illnesses as a result of eating contaminated food. National health and food protection authorities, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and the USDA estimate that there are thousands of foodborne illnesses each year. Symptoms can be similar to a flu-like illness or can be so serious as to cause death. Since foodborne illnesses are caused by contamination of the food by those who handle it and by improper temperature control of foods, training in proper food handling practices can substantially reduce the number of foodborne illnesses.

Question 2: Why must a certified person be on-duty during hours of food handling operation?

In order for the foodborne disease prevention training to be effective in reducing the number of foodborne illnesses, a trained/certified individual must be available whenever food is being prepared or handled to make sure that safe food handling practices are being used by all foodhandlers.

Question 3: Must all food establishments have a certified person?

No. Several types of food establishments are exempt from the certification requirement since the limited amount of food handling or preparation poses a low risk to the food and the consumer. Examples of food establishments that are not required to have a certified person are:

- Establishments that serve, without further handling, only commercially prepared, prepackaged potentially hazardous foods in the original packaging.
- Bed and breakfast establishments.
- Temporary food operations.
- Railroad cars in interstate commerce.

A food establishment that only handles non-potentially hazardous food or a limited amount of prepackaged potentially hazardous food may also apply for an exemption.

Question 4: If I believe that my food operation qualifies for an exemption or if I need more time to get a sufficient number of staff trained, what should I do?

Write to: George Zameska, Chief
 Office of Food Protection
 321 University Avenue - 2nd floor
 Philadelphia, PA 19104

Explain your reason for requesting an exemption or an extension of time and your request will be evaluated on the criteria below. After a review of the information you provide, you will be advised in writing of the decision.

1. Foodborne illness risks of the food handled at the establishment based on an evaluation of the chemical and biological characteristics of the food.
2. The amount of patronage of the establishment by high-risk populations such as the elderly, immuno-compromised individuals, and children.
3. The establishment's inspection history and number of consumer complaints.
4. Operational risks associated with food preparation, cooking, or handling procedures.

Question 5: Must a certified person be present at the food establishment if only cleaning or maintenance activities are being performed during that shift?

No. A certified person does not need to be present if the only activities being performed on that shift are cleaning or maintenance of equipment.

Question 6: Are courses and training materials available in languages other than English?

Yes. The enclosed list of public and private educational institutions and companies provides information on those that have foreign language options. These agencies should be contacted directly for more information.

Question 7: If I have received food safety training and have my certificate, can I teach my fellow employees through the use of staff meetings and individual training?

The Health Department highly encourages individuals to provide food service safety and sanitation training to their staff or fellow employees.

Question 8: Can I take a food safety course and test specific to my type of food establishment?

Yes, provided the training program meets pre-approved criteria. For more information on the acceptability of courses offered by professional associations, please call the Department at (215) 685-7498.

Question 9: What if I attend a training course or take a test and do not pass?

Each local training institute or company will have different retraining and re-testing options available. Please contact these agencies directly for more information.

Question 10: What will happen if my establishment is inspected by the Health Department and the certified individual is not present?

The requirement to have a certified individual present during all hours of operation is not to be interpreted in absolute terms. There may be a variety of circumstances and situations when the certified individual will not be present at the exact time a Health Department representative enters the food establishment to conduct an inspection. For example, the certified individual may be out on a delivery, absent due to a family emergency, illness or vacation. The Department will not consider these instances to be a violation nor a failure to comply.

Question 11: If my establishment operates for two or three shifts, how many certified individuals are required in the establishment?

Food establishments that operate on a 8-10 hour a day basis for a standard work week will only be required to have one certified individual for the establishment. When the hours of operation extend beyond a single work shift or extend to include a six or seven day work week requiring a change in operating personnel, then additional certified individuals will be necessary to cover these extended work periods.

Food establishments that operate on a continuous 24 hour basis will only be required to have a certified individual present during the shifts each day when the primary food handling and preparation activities occur.