

Food Facility Inspections in the City of Philadelphia

The Environmental Health Services division (EHS) of the Philadelphia Department of Public Health conducts routine inspections of food facilities in the City of Philadelphia. Most inspections occur once a year. During routine inspections, inspectors stress the prevention of food borne illness and educate food facility operators on proper food handling techniques. Some establishments may be inspected more frequently if they are considered high risk (e.g., institutions like hospitals that serve a population highly susceptible to food-borne illnesses and disease transmission). EHS also conducts reinspections, complaint-based inspections, and food-borne illness investigations. Most inspections are unannounced.

During an inspection, an EHS sanitarian observes food handling practices, checks food temperatures, and inspects the establishment for compliance with the regulations. At the end of the inspection, the sanitarian gives the food establishment a report that itemizes any and all food safety violations and explains how to correct them.

A Risk-Based Approach

The PDPH uses a risk-based approach to inspections. What this means is that EHS sanitarians focus primarily on the factors most likely to cause foodborne illness. Risk-based inspection reports provide a “snapshot” of the conditions at a food establishment at the time of the inspection.

Food safety violations fall under one of two types: **foodborne illness risk factors** and **good retail practices**.

Foodborne Illness Risk Factors

Foodborne illness risk factors include the first 27 categories listed on the inspection report, as well as any infestations of vermin (category 36). This section of the report focuses on improper practices or procedures identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as the most common risk factors for foodborne illness. Examples include:

- Improper hand washing
- Lack of hot water
- Not sanitizing food equipment
- Refrigeration problems
- Holding foods at improper temperatures
- Lack of food safety certified individual
- Rodent, roach or fly infestation

Good Retail Practices

Good retail practices include categories 28-56 listed on the inspection report. This section of the report focuses on systems to control basic operational and sanitary conditions within a food establishment. Examples include: pest control, equipment maintenance, plumbing, water and physical facilities.

Violations in this section are generally considered to be less serious than violations under foodborne illness risk factors because they pose less of an immediate threat to the public's health. However, a violation of category 36 ("insects, rodents & animals") is considered a serious risk factor for foodborne illness.

Examples of good retail practices include:

- Clean floors, walls and ceilings
- Proper storage of garbage
- Accessible thermometers
- Defective equipment

Food Safety Violations

Risk factors are marked either IN or OUT on the inspection report. If any are marked OUT, another inspection may be required within 30 business days. Some risk factors may be corrected on site, which means that the facility took sufficient action during the inspection to correct the violation (e.g., replacing towels at a hand-washing station). This is then listed on the report as COS, or corrected on site. Violations that have been noted on prior reports are marked as R or repeat on the report.

The most serious violations, which are of imminent public health significance or a severe vermin infestation, require the facility to cease operations until they are corrected. This is most often done voluntarily by the establishment owner, although the City has the authority to order an establishment closed should the owner fail to agree to a temporary closure.

For more information about foodborne illness and food facility inspections, please contact Environmental Health Services at 215-685-7495 or [send us a message](#).