

FACTFILE: GCE NUTRITION & FOOD SCIENCE

FOOD SAFETY IN ESTABLISHMENTS THAT SERVE FOOD



HACCP, Food Hygiene Rating Schemes and Food Law Inspections

Learning outcome

- Explain the following in relation to food safety in establishments that serve food: HACCP, food hygiene rating schemes and food law inspections.

HACCP

HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) is a food safety management system designed to control hazards at points critical to food safety. HACCP can be applied to any food process or operation and in its simplest form involves:

- **Identifying** food safety hazards ie. any hazard (biological, chemical or physical) that would make the food unsafe to eat.
- **Controlling** these hazards especially at those points critical to food safety. Critical limits are specified safety limits at these critical control points (CCP) which separate acceptable or safe food from unacceptable or unsafe food.
- **Monitoring** the controls ie. checking that controls are in place and are effective. Monitoring activity may involve temperature checks, visual inspection and time recording.
- **Corrective action** ie. the action taken when monitoring indicates that a control is not working and the critical limit has been exceeded. This involves rectifying the problem that resulted in the control failing and preventing its entry into the food chain. This often involves the destruction of the contaminated food.

- **Documentation** ie. recording details about the HACCP system including details of monitoring and any corrective action if it was necessary.

The Seven Principles of HACCP

HACCP is a food safety management system based on the following seven principles:



Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

The Food Hygiene Rating Act (Northern Ireland) established a mandatory rating scheme that came into force in 2016. The scheme is designed to improve food safety by requiring food establishments to be inspected by a district Food Safety Officer or Environmental Health Practitioner to determine the food hygiene rating. The hygiene standards found at the time of inspection are rated on a scale from 0-5, 0 meaning urgent improvement is necessary to 5 meaning the hygiene standards are very good.

The purpose of the scheme is to help consumers choose where to eat by providing information about hygiene standards in restaurants, hotels, pubs, cafes, takeaways, as well as food shops and supermarkets.

During inspection the Food Safety Officer will consider the following elements:

- Hygiene - how the food is prepared, cooked, reheated, cooled and stored.
- The condition of the building - this includes cleanliness, layout, lighting, ventilation and other facilities.
- Food safety - how this is managed and how the business records its procedures to make sure that food is safe.

If a top rating is not achieved the business will be informed of the improvements to be made in the form of an inspection report letter. Food businesses can request a re-rating inspection before the date of the next food hygiene inspection so improvements can be checked and a new rating given if appropriate. It is a legal requirement to display the rating in a prominent position near the entrance used by customers to the premises. They must be readily seen and easily read by customers before they enter the establishment.



Food Law Inspections

In Northern Ireland district councils are responsible for inspecting food premises to ensure they are compliant with food law. The inspections are conducted by Environmental Health Practitioners who check if businesses are producing and offering for sale food that is safe to eat. To do this they will examine:

- The premises.
- The type of food prepared and made.
- Work processes and procedures.
- Food safety management systems.

In addition, inspectors will examine how food is described for example on a menu or a food label to make sure the description is not misleading to the consumer. This includes checking information on food safety labelling, including allergy labelling.

Inspections may occur routinely or as a result of a customer complaint. How often a food inspection occurs depends on the type of business and also its previous record of food safety. Some premises may be inspected as often as every 6 months, while others may be much less often. Inspectors have the right to enter without notice and at all reasonable hours.

When inspectors visit, they must follow the Food Standards Agency's Framework Agreement on local authority food law enforcement and the Food Law Code of Practice. They will give feedback on any problems identified and advise on how they might be rectified. When inspectors give advice they must inform the owner if the advice is needed to comply with food law or whether it is good practice. If, as a result of the inspection, action is required this must be given in writing with a reasonable amount of time given to make the changes, except where there is immediate risk to public health.

When an inspector thinks it is necessary, they can take 'enforcement action' to protect the public. For example, they can inspect records, take photographs and samples of food or detain or seize food. Inspectors also have the power to serve notices. There are three main types of notice:

- 'Hygiene improvement notice' or 'food labelling improvement notice' which sets out certain things that must be done in order to comply with the law.
- 'Hygiene emergency prohibition notice' which forbids the use of certain processes, premises or equipment and must be confirmed by court.
- 'Remedial action notice' forbids the use of certain processes, premises or equipment or imposes conditions on how a process is carried out. It is similar to a hygiene emergency prohibition notice but it does not need to be confirmed by court.

It is a criminal offence not to comply with a notice once served. In serious cases, inspectors may recommend a prosecution which may result in a ban from managing a food business. It could also lead to a fine or imprisonment.

Suggested activities:

1. Create a flowchart to identify the seven principles of HACCP.
2. Outline the benefits for consumers and food business of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme.
3. Research the FSA website for the hygiene rating of local food establishments.

