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Retail Food Inspections FAQs

1. What is a retail food facility?

A Retail Food Facility includes any business or entity that sells or gives food (or beverage) to the public (e.g., customers, students, patients, inmates, homeless or needy). This includes restaurants, markets, farm stands, farmers' markets, bars, snack bars, school or staff cafeterias, detention facility kitchens, caterers, production kitchens, commissaries, cottage food, charitable feeding, temporary events (e.g., fairs, festivals), skilled nursing and hospital kitchens, and mobile food (food trucks, ice cream trucks, food carts).

2. How often will my retail food facility be inspected?

The inspection frequency is based on the risk category assigned the facility. The risk category is based on the type of foods and food handling practices. For example, a facility that cools hot foods for later service is inspected more frequently than one that sells only prepackaged non-perishable foods.

3. What are the risk categories?

Risk Category 3 – Three routine inspections per year.

Risk Category 2 – Two routine inspections per year.

Risk Category 1 – One routine inspection per year.

Risk Category 0 – No routine inspections per year, but periodic verification visits.

4. Are inspections scheduled?

Inspections are usually announced.

5. Do inspectors carry identification?

Yes. Inspectors have photo ID badges and business cards.

6. What actions is an inspector allowed to take?

An inspector is authorized to inspect any area of the premises (inside or outside), examine records, take photographs, ask questions of staff, collect samples, impound food or equipment, and collect evidence.

7. Can an inspector visit the facility when it is not open for customers?

Yes. If there are people onsite working, the inspector can conduct an inspection.

8. I didn't receive my inspection report, what should I do?

Contact your inspector or our office at (925) 608-5500.

9. What resources an Environmental Health provide my retail food facility?

Environmental Health has signage, training, and informational material that a food facility may find helpful. Staff are also available to answer questions.

10. What are some reasons that may result in a health permit suspension?

A health permit will be suspended if an immediate health hazard is found or if the facility does not have a health permit. Common reasons for health permit suspension:

- Pest infestation (cockroaches, mice, rats, flies)
- Sewage backup or discharge (inside or outside)
- Hot/cold holding problems (e.g., refrigeration not working)
- Power outage (no lighting for safety, refrigerators don't work, electric pilot lights for water heaters not working)
- No hot water
- Contaminated water supply
- Fire damage
- Foodborne illness outbreak
- Excessive ambient temperature (employees sweating into food, unsafe working conditions)

If any of these happen, close on your own, fix the probably and then reopen. After a fire, the Fire Department may require Environmental Health to verify that the facility is okay to reopen.