

Mobile Food Establishments

FOOD HANDLING PERMIT

Before starting the operation of a mobile food establishment, outside of a special event, the operator must hold a valid food handling permit issued by Alberta Health Services.

DEFINITIONS

Mobile Food Establishment Decal

A permanent sticker issued to the mobile food establishment by Alberta Health Services, which displays an identification number.

Handle

In relation to food, the supply, sale, offering for sale, processing, preparation, packaging, providing, display, service, dispensing, storage, or transportation of any food that is intended for public consumption.

Approved Food Establishment

Means a food establishment that has a food handling permit issued by Alberta Health Services.

High-risk Food

Means a food with a pH level or a water activity level, or a combination of pH and water activity levels that will support the growth of pathogenic micro-organisms or the production of their toxins.

These foods are more likely to contain and support the growth of microorganisms and are intended for consumption with or without further processing to destroy the organisms. Examples include raw meat, eggs, seafood or poultry, and foods containing these products as ingredients.

Medium-risk Food

Means foods that will support the growth of pathogenic microorganisms or the production of their toxins but does not include raw food of animal origin. These foods require proper handling in order to prevent contamination and growth of microorganisms. Examples include pre-cooked foods of animal origin, cooked rice and pasta, and cooked vegetables.

Low-risk Food

Means a food with a pH level or a water activity level, or a combination of pH and water activity levels that generally will not support the growth of pathogenic micro-organisms or the production of their toxins.

Minimal Food Handling

Food handling involving zero (prepackaged foods) to two food preparation step(s) or critical control points, such as held under 4°C and re-heated to 74°C.

- Generally means **no cooking, but reheating of ready-to-eat foods with minimal hand contact with food.**
- Food establishment may handle low and medium risk foods.
- Food establishments that may retail prepackaged low, medium, and high-risk foods.

Intermediate Food Handling

Food handling involving two to three food preparation steps (i.e., two to three critical control points).

- Generally means the food establishment **may include cooking but does not include cooling as a step in the food preparation process.**
- Food handling often includes medium risk foods with some handling of high-risk foods.

Extensive Food Handling

Food handling involving three or more food preparation steps (i.e., three or more critical control points).

- Generally means the food establishment **does batch cooking involving cooling of foods for later use** or
- Large quantities of high-risk foods are handled / prepared.
- High-risk foods are cooked, cooled or frozen, thawed, reheated, and then hot held.

Base of Operation:

An approved food establishment where the food preparation, food storage and cleaning for the mobile food establishment are carried out.

Fruit / Vegetable Hawker:

Means a vendor selling whole, raw fruits, and vegetables only.

Special Event:

Means an event open to and where food is made available to the general public that operates for not more than 15 days within a calendar year in any one health zone and includes, without limitation, fairs, festivals, exhibitions, promotional events, and carnivals.

TYPES OF MOBILE FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS

There are 5 different types of mobile food establishments. These types are defined by

- Level of food handling that is allowed, and
- Required equipment, such as number of sinks in the mobile food establishment, and
- Whether you require an approved base of operations as well as the mobile food establishment. More extensive food handling requires more equipment.

Type A:

A mobile food establishment that only sells

- Pre-packaged foods,
- Pre-prepared low-risk drinks are dispensed through a tap or spout from a sealed container.

- Type A mobile food establishment dispensing drinks as described **must have** an approved base of operation to prepare the drinks and for equipment cleaning.

Type B:

A mobile food establishment that must operate from an appropriate base of operation and carry sufficient additional service utensils to meet the needs of the operational period. A Type B mobile is approved for:

- Pre-packaged foods,
- Low-risk foods requiring minimal handling, such as popcorn, nachos, low-risk beverages.
- Dispensing of soft serve ice cream, gelato, medium risk pre-made beverages (e.g., dairy), mochas, cappuccinos, and dirty sodas.
- Minimal handling of medium risk foods using only limited utensils and equipment, restricted to heating, hot holding and portioning, such as hot dogs.
- Any additional handling or preparation must occur at an approved base of operation, or another AHS approved facility.

Type D:

Mobile food establishment that sells.

- Low and medium risk foods prepared with minimal to intermediate handling using limited equipment and utensils, such as french fries, sandwiches, drinks blended onsite, batter mixed onsite, smoothies.
- Raw meat cannot be prepared.
- Does not require an approved base of operation.

Type E:

Mobile food establishment that operates independent of any approved base of operation and is approved for minimal to extensive food handling of any type of food.

- A Type E mobile has appropriate equipment (including dishwashing) for the type of food served. Equipment requirements for this mobile must reflect the equipment requirements of an equivalent permanent food establishment.

Type F – Hawker:

A mobile food establishment that sells:

- Primal cuts of meat, whole fish, or seafood.

OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Plans

Owners of mobile food establishments must submit plans before construction and equipping of a new mobile food establishment begins; the plans must show the layout of all equipment, plumbing design, and construction details for approval by Alberta Health Services.

Mobile Food Establishment Decal

Each mobile food establishment will be issued an identifying decal. This decal is to be affixed to the mobile food establishment in a visible location.

Food Handling Permit

Each mobile food establishment will be issued a Food Handling Permit. This permit is also to be displayed on the mobile food establishment in a visible location.

Base of Operations

A base of operations is required for some type A and all type B mobile food establishments. You may have a base for any type of mobile. A Base of Operation is an approved designated area which is used for storage of food products, preparation/processing of food products and cleaning & sanitizing of equipment and for storage & maintenance of the mobile, must meet the following:

1. The area has been approved for the intended use by Alberta Health Services, and any subsequent changes are also approved.
2. Equipped with mechanical refrigeration and other food preparation equipment for the intended processing as required by Alberta Health Services.
3. Sufficient dishwashing and handwashing capabilities for the level of food handling taking place.
4. Walls and ceiling are smooth, washable, and non-absorbent.
5. All light fixtures have protective covers.
6. Floors are smooth, washable, and impervious to moisture (e.g., tile, linoleum, sealed concrete).
7. Adequate safe storage for food and equipment.
8. Cleaning areas are separate from storage/processing areas.

A mobile food establishment that uses a base of operation for dishwashing purposes must return to the base each day to wash, rinse, and sanitize equipment and utensils. If a mobile food establishment is operating in an area too far from the base to return each day, its operational restrictions should reflect the lack of dishwashing availability.

In instances where a base of operation is not used for storage of the mobile food establishment, storage of the mobile must comply with one of the following:

1. No structure/location is required for outside storage when the mobile food establishment is fully enclosed with floors, walls, and a ceiling.
2. A garage or shed type structure is used for storage of the mobile food establishment. If the garage/shed is used for any other purposes, the mobile food establishment must also be covered to protect it from contamination from other uses.
3. A washable and waterproof cover (vinyl or similar material) is fitted over the entire mobile food establishment.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

A mobile food establishment must be a permanently assembled/affixed/built facility unless the operator can demonstrate to the satisfaction of a Public Health Inspector that all necessary components of the mobile food establishment can and will be properly assembled at a defined location each time the mobile food establishment operates.

1. When present, walls, floors, and ceilings shall have a smooth, impervious, washable finish.
2. Where applicable, a reasonable separation should exist between the driver area (non-food area) and the food processing areas. This may be achieved with a physical partition or adequate spacing and kitchen design.
3. For fully enclosed mobile food establishments, it is recommended that all openings, including service windows, be fitted with screens that can be closed when not in use.
4. Adequate space shall be provided on the mobile food establishment for the handling of food, hot or cold storage, dry goods, equipment, and service containers as applicable.
5. All surfaces shall be constructed to allow easy cleaning.
6. Mobile food establishments must have sufficient supply of power/gas to operate food equipment on a consistent basis without sacrificing one piece of equipment for another.
7. All light fixtures shall have protective covers.
8. Any tanks used for potable water or wastewater must be secured to prevent spills and shifting while in transit.

Plumbing/Sinks:

Those mobile food establishments that are used for handling of open foods shall be equipped to allow for the proper handwashing and the cleaning/sanitizing of utensils. A supply of hot and cold water of sufficient volume to last the entire duration of operations is required. The number of sinks and water volumes for all mobile food establishments must comply with Table 1 below.

Table 1: Sinks, Water Supply and Base of Operation

Type	Food Handling Examples	Number of Sinks	Minimum Water Volume (litres)*	Base of Operation
A	Carts with pre-packaged foods, low-risk beverage dispensing , mobile packaged sandwich vendors	0	0	No Yes, if dispensing drinks
B	popcorn, or hot dog carts, soft serve ice cream, mochas, cappuccinos, and dirty sodas	1	20 (37 litres if making steamed dairy/non-dairy based drinks)	Yes
D	Independent mobile doing minimal to intermediate food handling (pizza, French fries, smoothies)	2	75 (130 if dipper well in use)	No
E	Food preparation involving any type of food and any level of food handling (no reuseable customer utensils)	3 (a hand sink and a separate 2 compartment sink)	130	No
F	Pre-portioned primal cuts and whole gutted fish	0	0	No

*Water volumes are minimums. Higher water volumes may be required based on the activity and expected water usage (e.g., cappuccino, dipper well)

1. All dishwashing sinks must be made of non-corrodible metal of sufficient size and volume for washing and sanitizing of serving and cooking utensils & equipment, for food preparation and for general cleaning of the mobile food establishment. All utensils, containers, and equipment must be able to be immersed in the sink including pots, mixing bowls, cutting boards, etc.
2. Every dish sink must be equipped with a drain plug or similar device that enables compartments to be filled with water and space for drying of dishes.
3. Sinks for hand washing shall be no smaller than 25 cm x 25 cm x 14 cm deep.
4. Freshwater holding tanks must be filled from an approved source using food grade hoses.
5. At the start of each operating season, the freshwater tanks and lines must be disinfected and thoroughly flushed. Only food grade anti-freeze may be used to winterize the mobile food establishment and must be flushed from the system before startup.
6. Samples of water used for food preparation or hand washing must be collected from the mobile food establishments taps and submitted to the provincial laboratory for analysis before the initial operation for the season or, if in operation continuously, once a year. Additional samples may be required by a PHI.

7. Potable hot and cold water at a suitable pressure must always be available at all sinks on the mobile food establishment.
8. Pressure for all taps must not be from gravity feed.
9. Entire water supply must be immediately available (drawn from a single source without needing to switch tanks).
10. Operators of a stationary food establishment (e.g., shipping container) or mobile food establishment operating on a long-term basis from a fixed location must be connected to the local potable water supply. If no local water supply is available, EPH may require connection to an alternate, consistent potable water supply similar to a rural food facility.
11. All mobile food establishments which require water must be equipped with a hot water heater or similar approved plumbing device that provides active heating of the hot water supply. To test if the hot water heater is sufficient, fill both dishwashing sinks with hot/warm water. There must be hot water remaining for handwashing purposes. If you run out of hot water, then the hot water heater is too small.
12. Hoses or water lines that connect the potable water supply to the plumbing fixtures must be food grade material.
13. All plumbing connections must meet relevant plumbing code requirements.
14. Mobile food establishments that intend to operate during winter months must take adequate steps to ensure water supplies and wastewater lines do not freeze up during cold weather.

Handwashing Basins:

1. Temporary handwashing basins are not allowed on a mobile food establishment. All handwashing basins shall be connected to the central plumbing and wastewater system of the mobile food establishment.
2. Water supplied to a handwashing basin must be at a temperature between 30°C and 45°C.
3. Handwashing basins must be readily accessible to employees and located in every area where food is prepared or processed.
4. Handwashing basins must be supplied with hand soap and single-use towels in suitable dispensers.
5. The handwashing faucet must allow for both hands to be washed at the same time in the stream of water.

Steamed Dairy / Non-Dairy Based Drinks:

1. Steamed dairy/non-dairy based drinks require a minimal level of food handling but use small pitchers for the steaming of dairy/non-dairy which require constant rinsing. Such carts will require a minimal 37 litres of potable water supply to allow for both handwashing and pitcher rinsing.
2. Additional replacement pitchers/equipment will be required appropriate for the operational period. Dishwashing of the pitchers shall occur at the base of operations using appropriate dishwashing methods. Additional identified pitchers may also be required to reduce allergen concerns.
3. An approved clean in place method will need to be demonstrated for the steam wand.

4. Food establishments operating as Type D and Type E mobiles will already have adequate water and dishwashing provisions onsite, so the above specifications don't apply.

Sewer System:

1. The wastewater tank must be enclosed and must be 10% larger than the total water supply volume.
2. If the wastewater holding tank within a mobile food establishment vehicle cannot be removed, there must be a drain in the tank suitably located to allow for easy draining into a sanitary sewer.
3. Wastewater shall be disposed into an approved sanitary sewer. Contact your local municipality to identify drop-off locations.
4. System must meet relevant plumbing code requirements.
5. Operators of a stationary food establishment (e.g., shipping container) or mobile food establishment operating from a fixed location must be connected to a local, approved, sewage disposal system.

Dipper Wells:

1. All mobile food establishments, where frozen dairy or dairy substitute products are scooped, shall use an approved method of handling scoops between uses.
2. Where dipper wells are used, they must be connected to a continuously running approved potable water supply during the mobile food establishment's operating hours and at a rate that will ensure adequate rinsing of the scoop.
3. Operations using a dipper well must have a potable water supply of at least 130 litres.

Ventilation:

1. Every enclosed mobile food establishment used for deep frying or where extensive grease or steam are produced during cooking must have a properly operating ventilation system. This ventilation system must be equipped with a hood, fan, and filters to remove odours, fumes, steam, vapour, smoke, or excess heat. The system must comply with all relevant codes and regulations.
2. Every ventilation filter must be easy to remove to allow for cleaning and replacement or designed to be cleaned in place.

MEAT OR FISH SOLD BY A HAWKER

1. Food shall not be sold in **self-serve** bulk form.
2. Oysters and any other shellfish may be sold in bulk form if protection is provided by natural shells.
3. Food products offered for sale must:
 - Not be processed or packaged on or about the vehicle.
 - Be pre-wrapped with food grade packaging material and processed in a permitted establishment.
 - Be obtained from approved sources and must be properly labeled. This can be achieved by either labeling the product itself, using labeled bags or supplying business cards with each purchase. Information should include the name of the business, address, and telephone number.

Contact us at 1-833-476-4743 or [submit a request online](#) at ahs.ca/eph.

PUB-0404-202512

©2025 Alberta Health Services, Safe Healthy Environments



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). You are free to copy, distribute and adapt the work for non-commercial purposes, as long as you attribute the work to Alberta Health Services and abide by the other license terms. If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same, similar, or compatible license. The license does not apply to content for which the Alberta Health Services is not the copyright owner.

This material is intended for general information only and is provided on an "as is," "where is" basis. Although reasonable efforts were made to confirm the accuracy of the information, Alberta Health Services does not make any representation or warranty, express, implied or statutory, as to the accuracy, reliability, completeness, applicability or fitness for a particular purpose of such information.