

Starting a Food Business

This step-by-step guide is designed to assist Albertans through the process of opening a food business. Whether you're starting a restaurant, café, food truck, or catering business, we want to help you succeed and get your food business up and running as quickly as possible. Our public health inspectors and administrative support team are here to assist you throughout the application and approval process. We're committed to helping you understand the requirements and avoid delays. **Call us Monday to Friday at 1-833-476-4743.**

Follow these steps to start a food business in Alberta:

- Step 1** Identify the type of food business you want to start
- Step 2** Confirm with your local town/municipal zoning and bylaws,
- Step 3** Review Alberta's Food Regulations, Food Retail and Foodservice Code, Alberta's Building Code and contact your town/municipal Development office.
- Step 4** Develop a floor plan and draw a layout
- Step 5** Submit your plan to your local municipality and/or EPH office
- Step 6** Get your building permits (if necessary) and start construction
- Step 7** Register in an approved food safety-training course
- Step 8** Apply for a food handling permit
- Step 9** Prepare for an approval inspection
- Step 10** Pay your food handling permit fee

Step 1: Identify the type of food business you want to start.

A food permit **is required** for the operation of;

Commercial food establishments

Owners of commercial food establishments must have a valid Food Handling Permit to operate. Commercial food establishments include bakeries, bars and lounges, butcher shops, cafeterias, caterers, convenience stores, delicatessens, home-based businesses that prepare high-risk foods, restaurants, work camps, childcare and adult care.

Note: Only daycares and senior homes with more than 10 clients require a Food Handling Permit.

Mobile food establishments

All mobile food establishments require a Food Handling Permit. Starting a mobile food establishment business has unique considerations. Read more about [Mobile Food Establishments](#).

Catering businesses

Caterers must have a Food Handling Permit for an approved kitchen where they prepare their food.

A food permit is **not required** for the operation of;

- (i) a community organization function,
- (ii) a business that provides individually portioned samples of a particular food at no charge for the purpose of promoting the sale of that food,
- (iii) a stall at a farmers' market, or
- (iv) a temporary food establishment at a special event, or
- (v) the handling of [low-risk home-prepared food](#) (LRHPF). LRHPF is for direct-to-consumer sales only, meaning LRHPF businesses cannot sell or provide their products to permitted food facilities.

Step 2: Confirm your local town/municipal zoning and bylaws.

Confirm that your local town/municipal zoning and bylaws allow for your proposed business activity. Zoning and bylaws may prohibit certain commercial activities in residential areas. Contact your local town/municipal office for more information on zoning and bylaws.

Step 3: Review Alberta's Food Regulation, Food Retail and Foodservices Code, Alberta's Building Code and contact your town/municipal development office

Alberta's Food Regulation and Code

Alberta's [Food Regulation](#) establishes your food business's construction, sanitation, hygiene, and operational requirements. It is the owner's responsibility that their facility meets all regulatory requirements.

The [Food Retail and Foodservices Code](#) supplements the Food Regulation to model requirements for the foodservice and food retail industry. This code of practice provides operators with interpretations, rationale, and guidance related to food safety.

National Building Code – Alberta Edition

The [Building Code](#) establishes the minimum standards for building safety, such as fire protection, structural integrity, heating and ventilation, plumbing, and other safety measures.

Note: Grease interceptors

Wastewater Bylaws and the National Plumbing Code require food service businesses such as restaurants, kitchens and production facilities to use a properly sized grease interceptor. Contact your local town/municipal office for more information on grease interceptors.

Keep grease interceptors clean to protect your property and surrounding areas from a sewer backup, odours and clogged pipes. You can reduce your maintenance costs by scraping your dishes before washing them.

Contact your town/municipal development office

Contact your local Safety Codes Officer for information on local ordinances, bylaws, and required approval processes. Any building used for your food business must comply with the Alberta Building Code.

Contact your local town/municipal office for more information on grease interceptors.

Other considerations

National Fire Code – Alberta Edition

The Fire Code establishes the minimum standard for fire prevention, firefighting and life safety in buildings. These standards regulate fire hazards, maintenance of fire safety equipment, egress facilities, portable extinguishers, building contents limitations, and fire safety plan establishment.

Contact your local Safety Codes Officer or fire department for fire safety information and required approval processes. Your business must operate from a building that complies with the Fire Code and local ordinances.

Canadian Food Inspection Agency- Labelling requirements

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) establishes the [labelling requirements](#) for packaged food and regulates interprovincial food retail. Go to www.inspection.gc.ca for more information.

Potable Water Requirements

Water supplies should only be from an approved source, such as:

- i) a public water system; or
- ii) a private water system that is constructed, maintained, and operated to meet health requirements, and is approved by the local or provincial/territorial regulatory agency.

Premises that are equipped with their own private water supply should have a written water sampling plan and protocol. Samples of the water should be tested at a government or accredited laboratory at a frequency deemed necessary by the regulatory agency. Test results for potable water in most jurisdictions must meet or exceed the minimum health requirements as prescribed in the current publication of the Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality, published by Health Canada. The use of non-potable water in food establishment is prohibited.

Only potable water in either form of liquid, steam or ice shall come in direct or indirect contact with food during food handling, processing, and cleaning. Potable water shall conform to the standards outlined in Health Canada's Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality.

Note: Canadians can visit [BizPaL \(Business Permits and Licenses\)](#). This is a free, online service that helps Canadian entrepreneurs identify the permits and licenses required to start or grow a business.

Step 4: Develop a floor plan and layout

Operators must develop a plan for approval **before** constructing a new food business or making any major alterations to an existing food establishment.

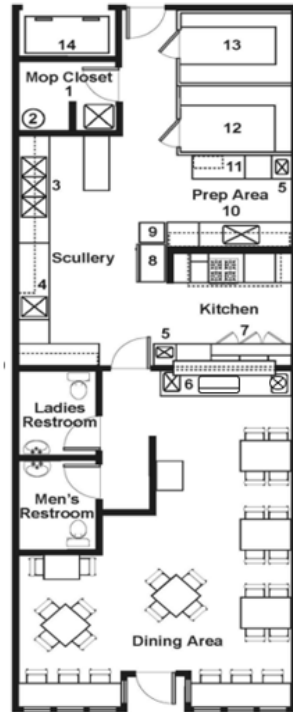
Major alterations include additions or changes to the physical structures, adding major equipment or modifications to the plumbing or ventilation systems. Major alterations do not include redecoration, cosmetic repair, altering seating design or reducing seating capacity.

Use the following checklist to ensure your plans are complete:

- Draw to scale (include room dimensions) all food-related areas, including the following:
 - kitchen
 - food storage
 - washrooms
 - bar area
 - dishwashing
 - laundry room
 - serving stations
 - retail area
 - garbage area
 - mechanical room
- Show the location of all equipment.
 - refrigerators
 - freezers
 - handwash sinks
 - dishwashers
 - exhaust canopy
 - dishwashing sinks
 - food preparation sink
 - dipper wells
 - hot holding equipment
 - all food processing and preparation equipment
 - cookline and cooking appliances
- Provide details and specifications for plumbing and lighting.
 - sewer lines
 - floor drains
 - janitorial/mop sink
 - grease traps
 - light fixtures
 - hot water systems
 - light covers
- Provide information on the potable water source or water treatment if applicable.
 - municipal water
 - well
 - cistern
 - other
- Provide details and specifications for surface finishes. Floors, walls, and ceilings in food handling and storage areas must be impervious, washable, durable and light-coloured.
 - walls
 - baseboards
 - floors
 - countertops
 - ceilings
 - shelving
- Identify the indoor and outdoor dining area locations and the number of seats.
- List all food items for sale. Include a copy of the full menu if applicable.
- Describe the type of utensils customers will use (e.g. reusable, single-use, or both).

Note: Your food establishment may not include all equipment and areas listed or may include other items. Contact your local public health inspector with any questions at 1-833-476-4743.

Sample Diagram of a Food Establishment's Floor Plan



Equipment Schedule

1. Mop Sink
2. Hot Water Heater
3. 3 Compartment Pot and Pan Wash Sink
4. Dishwasher with Pre-Rinse Sink
5. Hand Sink
6. Bar – Hand sink, Ice well and Dump sink
7. Sandwich Preparation Refrigerator
8. Reach-in Refrigerator
9. Ice Machine
10. Food Preparation sink
11. Work Counter with Slicer
12. Walk-in refrigerator
13. Walk-in freezer
14. Garbage area

Finish Schedule

Floors

- Kitchen – Vinyl Comp Tile with Base Coving
- Restroom - Vinyl Comp Tile with Base Coving
- Dining – Low Fill Carpet
- Garbage – Sealed Concrete

Walls

- Kitchen – Finished Washable Drywall (Gypsum Board) and FRP
- Cook line – Stainless Steel
- Dishwasher – Gypsum Green Board with FRP* board
- Restroom - Gypsum Green Board with FRP* board
- Dining – Gypsum Board with Enamel Paint

Ceiling

- Kitchen – Gypsum Board with Enamel Paint
- Dining – Suspended with Acoustical Tile
- Restroom – Finished Washable Drywall (Gypsum Board)

*FRP: Fibreg Reinforced Plastic

MENU

APPETIZERS

- Seared scallops
- Borchetta with seared tomatoes
- House charcuterie

SOUP & SALAD

- Chef's choice soup
- Greek salad, beet & feta, Avocado salad

MAINS

- Beef Steak
- Grilled Salmon
- Stuffed Pasta
Chicken & prosciutto with roasted mushrooms and spinach

DESSERTS

- Tiramisu, Crème brûlée, Chocolate mousse

WINE

- House red, white and sparkling

BEER

- Assorted foreign and domestic

COCKTAIL

- Mimosa, martini

NON-ALCOHOLIC

- Espresso, Tea, Fruit Juices, Sparkling water

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Requirements for Food preparation Sinks & Hand Washing Basins in Commercial Food Establishments					
NOTE 1: Handwashing basins in customer or staff washrooms, dishwasher slop sinks or janitorial sinks are NOT acceptable for meeting these requirements.					
NOTE 2: Dishwashers should have their own separate slop sink and accompanying drain racks.					
	MINIMUM Requirements (Utensils Type and Usage)				Notes
Food Establishment Providing;	No reusable customer utensils	Reusable customer utensils WITH NO dishwasher	Reusable customer utensils WITH dishwasher	Reusable customer utensils WITH dishwasher	If the food establishment will allow reusable customer utensils, the facility also requires the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • handwashing basin, • 2-compartment sink and, • a dishwasher that meets the AHS Dishwashing Standard OR • Hand washing basin AND 3-compartment sink
			ALL utensils WILL fit into a dishwasher	ALL utensils WILL NOT fit into a dishwasher	
Mobile Food Establishments	Not applicable, refer to Mobile Food Establishments				
Prepackaged foods Foods are self-served from their approved original containers using disposable utensils.	A sink is not required, but access to water is needed.	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	
Coffee (brew/drip) and other low-risk foods Served from original, approved containers using disposable utensils. Self-contained processing unit that dispenses water or coffee and is cleaned and sanitized by a clean-in-place method.	1-compartment sink	3-compartment sink	1-compartment sink	Not applicable	A 3-compartment sink is sufficient to enable hand washing and cleaning of customer utensils because only coffee and low-risk foods are dispensed, and there is no food preparation. e.g. Service station or convenience store operation with coffee and/or single self-serve prepackaged frozen food products. OR Personal services establishment serving beverages in reusable glassware.

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Minimal food handling/preparation Only low-risk foods, including hot dogs, re-heating pre-cooked frozen foods, popcorn, etc.	2-compartment sink *See notes below on additional considerations	3-compartment sink *See notes below on additional considerations	1- compartment sink *See notes below on additional considerations	2-compartment sink *See notes below on additional considerations	An additional handwashing basin is not required because of the limited handling of low-risk foods. The sinks can be used for limited food handling and hand washing.
Extensive / Limited food handling of high and low-risk foods (<u>with a separate food preparation area</u>)	Handwashing sink, 2-compartment sink. <u>(Additional hand sink and 1-compartment food preparation sink)</u> *See notes below on additional considerations	Handwashing sink, 3-compartment sink. <u>(Additional hand sink and 1-compartment food preparation sink)</u> *See notes below on additional considerations	Handwashing sink, 2-compartment sink (dishwashing back up). <u>(Additional hand sink and 1-compartment food preparation sink)</u> *See notes below on additional considerations	Handwashing sink, 2-compartment sink (dishwashing back up). <u>(Additional hand sink and 1-compartment food preparation sink)</u> *See notes below on additional considerations	A 2-compartment sink is encouraged as a backup to the dishwasher. For manual sanitizing, dishes can be cleaned in the dishwasher, and only one sink is needed to sanitize them. The single sink is also used for food preparation.

For more information, visit Safe Healthy Environments

ahs.ca/eph
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Additional Considerations for Sink Requirements

Sanitation Sinks

- Sinks used for sanitation should have 45 cm self-draining drainboards provided on both sides with raised edges.
- Sinks should have rounded inside corners to facilitate proper sanitation.

Food Preparation Sinks

- Required if there is rinsing, washing, draining, or thawing of raw meat, poultry or seafood.
- We recommend separate sinks will be provided for fruit and vegetable preparation and a separate sink for meat preparation.
- The sinks must be stainless steel, have rounded corners, raised edges and have at least one 18" self-draining integral drainboard.
- Ideally, sinks used for food preparation will be indirectly plumbed.

Hand Washing Basins

- Handwashing basins must remain accessible, within the line of sight, and recommended within 8 metres of all areas where food or beverages are handled, prepared, or served.
- Consider potential splashing and cross-contamination risks in proximity to the handwash basin. A barrier may be required to reduce cross-contamination.
- Additional handwashing basins may be required depending on the size and layout of kitchen.

Outdoor Food Preparation Areas (BBQ, Smokers)

- Outdoor food preparation areas should be equipped with proper provisions to ensure food safety, including functional hand washing sinks.
- Operators wanting to permanently use exterior BBQ or smokers should ensure proper handwashing sinks are available.
- The Public Health Inspector may provide additional guidance upon reviewing the plans.

Dump Sinks

- Recommended in bars, pubs and taverns.
- Located near the glass washer in the beverage service area.

Slop Sink

- Is recommended to be stationed on the “dirty” side of the dishwasher area. Facilitates scraping and pre-cleaning before dishwashing.
- Should be equipped with screening system to capture large items for garbage disposal.

Mop/Utility Sink

- At least one mop sink or curbed cleaning facility with a floor drain is required.
- The sink needs to be equipped with a vacuum break/backflow prevention.

Step 5: Submit your plan to your public health inspector

Submit your plans at least six weeks before you want to start construction to allow you to make alterations in response to the local public health inspector's assessment of the plans.

For businesses within the City of Edmonton or the City of Calgary, submit your plans **directly** to that city's planning department, which will circulate a copy of your plans to your local Environmental Public Health (EPH) office. Call 3-1-1 or visit www.edmonton.ca or www.calgary.ca for more information.

Submit your plans to your local Public Health Inspector for businesses outside Edmonton or Calgary. Visit www.ahs.ca/eph to find your local EPH office.

Step 6. Get your building permits and start construction

Some Alberta municipalities require building permits before beginning construction. Make sure you check with your local municipality to determine the local requirements. Once you have a completed plan review from both EPH and your local municipality, you may build or renovate your food establishment.

Any changes to your plans will require new approval from the appropriate departments.

Contact your local EPH office at www.ahs.ca/eph if you have any questions during construction or to schedule an on-site inspection during construction, to ensure you meet health requirements. Your final approval inspection will not be conducted until construction is complete and all equipment is installed and operational.

Step 7: Register for an approved food safety training course

Alberta's Food Regulation requires that at least one person in the care and control of a food facility be certified in food safety. Here is [a list of Alberta-approved certificates](https://www.alberta.ca/system/files/custom_downloaded_images/health-recognized-food-safety-courses-alberta.pdf) (https://www.alberta.ca/system/files/custom_downloaded_images/health-recognized-food-safety-courses-alberta.pdf)

If your food establishment has six or more food handlers, including serving staff, working on a shift, a certified person must be on-site at the facility at all times.

EPH strongly recommends food safety training for everyone who handles food but does not mandate food safety certification for the following food establishments:

- Bed and breakfasts.
- Convenience and food facilities that only handle prepackaged foods.
- Farmers' market vendors
- Temporary food booths at special events
- Social care facilities such as daycares and senior homes, that serve less than ten clients.
- Private homes selling low-risk home-prepared food.

Find out more about food safety training courses at www.ahs.ca/eph.

Step 8: Apply for your Food Handling Permit

Complete a [Food Handling Permit Application](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/eph/Page15563.aspx) on the EPH website (<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/eph/Page15563.aspx>) Once submitted, efforts will be made by the Public Health Inspector to schedule an approval inspection within 7 business days of receiving the required documentation.

Before the approval inspection, ensure that all construction is complete, all equipment and fixtures are in place and operating, and the premises are clean. Refer to the approval checklist in Step 9. A public health inspector will contact you to arrange an approval inspection.

IMPORTANT: A food handling permit is **not** transferable if you purchase an existing food establishment. New owners must apply for a new food handling permit at least 7 days before taking over the operation. A public health inspector must complete an approval inspection before you begin operating.

Step 9: Prepare for an approval inspection

Use this checklist to prepare for your approval inspection:

- Construction or renovations are 100% complete.
- The facility and all equipment are clean.
- Facilities requiring a potable water sample must submit the sample to the lab yearly or as required by your public health inspector.
- Facilities not connected to a municipal water or sewage system must have a system that meets the requirements of the [Public Health Guidelines for Non-Municipal Drinking Water](#).
- Cooler units are operational and can hold food at 4°C (40°F) or less.
- Freezer units are operational and can hold food at less than 0°C (32°F). Ideally, the temperature is less than -18°C (0°F).
- A thermometer in each cooler and freezer is separate from the built-in temperature gauge.
- At least one probe thermometer capable of measuring temperatures between 0°C and 100°C is available for staff.
- Food-grade shelving in coolers and freezers that allows for proper air circulation.
- Hand wash sinks with liquid hand soap and paper towels in proper dispensers nearby.
- Hot and cold running water is available at all sinks.
- The dishwasher(s) is plumbed and fully functional, including the sanitizing cycle.
- Separate plumbed sinks are used for handwashing, dishwashing, food prep, and janitorial/mop sinks.
- Food-grade surface sanitizer is prepared and in appropriate dispensing bottles.
- Test strips for each type of sanitizer used in the food establishment.
- A written cleaning schedule.
- A written pest control plan.
- Food safety training certificates for supervisors/persons in care and control.
- Approved ventilation or exhaust canopy.
- Shatterproof light fixtures.
- Durable, washable, and light-coloured floors, walls and ceilings in food preparation areas that are impervious to moisture.
- Sealed floor-wall joints, and doors/windows constructed to prevent the entry of pests.
No pests.
- Watertight garbage containers in food preparation and washroom areas.

Step 10: Pay your Food Handling Permit Fee

After the food establishment passes an approval inspection, EPH emails you an invoice for the food handling permit fee. Instructions on how to pay your permit fee will be found on your invoice. Charitable organizations and food businesses that only sell prepackaged low-risk food do not pay permit fees but will still receive a Food Handling Permit.

EPH will email you your food handling permit after you have paid the food handling permit fee. Print the permit, protect it with a transparent cover, and post it where the public can see it. Your food handling permit is valid for one year. To maintain a valid food handling permit, the annual renewal fee must be paid in a timely manner upon receipt of the invoice. Please ensure that your contact information with EPH is accurate and up to date.

A public health inspector may make unannounced inspections of your food establishment once you have a food handling permit to assess compliance with the Public Health Act. Other organizations may also inspect your facility to assess compliance with other requirements, e.g., fire code. It is the operator's responsibility to comply with all legislation and local requirements of a food establishment at all times.

Schedule of Fee for Food Handling Permits

- **Class I (\$100):** Food handlers that process, sell or manufacture non-perishable or prepackaged products with minimal food handling and processing.
- **Class II (\$175):** Food handlers are only involved in limited handling, processing, manufacturing, selling or packaging of raw ingredients and cooking or preparing foods to order. Hot and cold holding of high-risk food is restricted to single-meal service.
- **Class III (\$250):** Food handlers that are involved in extensive handling of raw ingredients and the processing, manufacturing, selling or packaging of high-risk food (including beef, poultry, foods of animal origin eaten raw or lightly cooked), extensive food handling or serve high-risk clientele.
- **Class IV (\$500):** Food handlers that operate multiple food operations within one building under the same owner or operator.

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

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