

ANNEX C – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the food hygiene rating scheme for?

The scheme provides information on food hygiene to help you choose where to eat out or shop for food by giving you information about the hygiene standards in restaurants, pubs, cafés, takeaways, hotels and other places you eat, as well as supermarkets and other food shops.

The scheme also encourages businesses to improve hygiene standards.

Who runs the scheme?

The scheme is run by local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in partnership with the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

Local authorities are responsible for carrying out inspections of food businesses to check that they meet the requirements of food hygiene law.

The FSA is the UK government department responsible for food safety. It gives local authorities advice, training, and other support to help them run the scheme.

Is the scheme run in all parts of the UK?

The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme is a 'national scheme' run in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. A similar scheme is run in Scotland.

Each local authority can choose whether or not it wants to take part so the scheme is not running in all areas of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Some local authorities choose to run their own local schemes.

The FSA is working with local authorities to encourage as many of them as possible to run the 'national scheme' so you can compare hygiene ratings of food businesses in your local area and further away from home.

Why does Scotland have a different scheme?

A different scheme called the 'Food Hygiene Information Scheme' is run in Scotland. When this scheme was tried out and tested in Scotland, the public, food businesses and local authorities in that country said they wanted the scheme to continue there.

You can search for the inspection results of businesses in Scotland and read more about the Scottish scheme at [food.gov.uk/ratings](https://www.food.gov.uk/ratings).

What types of food business are given a rating?

Ratings are given to places where you can eat out such as restaurants, takeaways, cafés, sandwich shops, pubs and hotels. Ratings are also given to schools, hospitals and residential care homes.

Places where you shop for food, such as supermarkets, bakeries, and delicatessens, are also given a rating.

Not all businesses in these groups are given a rating. This is because some businesses, for example a newsagent selling sweets, are a low risk to people's health so are not included in the scheme. These businesses are said to be 'exempt' from the scheme.

What does 'exempt' mean?

The two groups of exempt businesses are:

- businesses that are a low-risk to people's health in terms of food safety and that you perhaps wouldn't normally think of as a food business – for example, newsagents, chemist shops or visitor centers selling tins of biscuits
- childminders and businesses that offer caring services at home

These types of business can ask to receive a food hygiene rating if they wish. Only details of those in the first group will be published on food.gov.uk/ratings but those in the second group can share their rating with parents and others using their services.

How is a hygiene rating worked out?

A food safety officer from the local authority inspects a business to check that it meets the requirements of food hygiene law.

At the inspection, the officer will check:

- how hygienically the food is handled – how it is prepared, cooked, re-heated, cooled and stored
- the condition of the structure of the buildings – the cleanliness, layout, lighting, ventilation and other facilities
- how the business manages and records what it does to make sure food is safe

The hygiene standards found at the time of inspection are then rated on a scale. At the bottom of the scale is '0' – this means urgent improvement is required. At the top of the scale is '5' – this means the hygiene standards are very good.

The rating given shows how well the business does overall. The business may do better in some areas and less well in others and the rating takes this into account. This includes those areas that need improving the most.

The officer will explain to the person who owns or manages the business what improvements need to be made and what action they can take to improve their hygiene rating.

What do the different ratings mean?

The food hygiene rating reflects the hygiene standards found at the time of inspection by a food safety officer from the business's local authority.

A business can be given one of these ratings:



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A rating shows you how well the business is meeting the requirements of food hygiene law. It gives you an idea of what's going on in the kitchen, or behind closed doors, so you can choose where you eat or buy food.

How often will a restaurant or other food business be given a new rating?

A new rating is given each time the business is inspected by a food safety officer from the business's local authority.

How often inspections take place depends on the risk to people's health. The greater the risk, the more often the business is inspected.

If the business owner or manager makes improvements to hygiene standards, the business can ask its local authority for a visit to be carried out before the date of the next planned inspection. This means these improvements can be checked and a new rating could be given.

Why are businesses with poor ratings not closed?

Businesses given ratings of '0' or '1' must make urgent or major improvements to hygiene standards. The local authority food safety officer will use a number of enforcement tools as well as giving advice and guidance to make sure these improvements are made.

If the officer finds that a business's hygiene standards are very poor and there is an imminent risk to health – this means food is not safe to eat – the officer must take action to ensure that consumers are protected. This could mean prohibiting part of an operation or closing the business down.

How can I find out what the rating is for a takeaway or other food business?

If a takeaway or other food business has been given a rating, you can search for it on [food.gov.uk/ratings](https://www.food.gov.uk/ratings).

When you eat out or shop for food, you might see a sticker in the window or on the door, or a certificate on display, showing you the hygiene rating for that business. Businesses are encouraged to display these stickers and certificates in a place where you can easily see them when you visit.

These stickers and certificates will also show the date the hygiene standards were inspected by the local authority's food safety officer.

If you don't see the rating at a takeaway or other food business, you can ask a member of staff if the business is in the scheme and what rating was given at the last inspection.

Does a food business have to show its rating?

No, so if you see a business without a hygiene rating sticker or certificate, you'll have to decide if you want to eat or buy food from there without knowing the hygiene standards.

Putting a hygiene rating on show is a good advertisement for businesses that meet the requirements of food hygiene law.

A good food hygiene rating is good for business.

What does 'awaiting inspection' mean?

If a new business has been set up, or there is a new owner, it will not have a food hygiene rating to begin with but it may display a sticker or certificate that says 'awaiting inspection'. A rating will be given after a local authority food safety officer has inspected the business to check the hygiene standards.

What can the owner of a business do if they think the rating given is unfair or wrong?

The owner or manager of the business should talk to the local authority food safety officer that inspected the business about why the rating was given.

If the business owner or manager still thinks that the rating is unfair or wrong, they can appeal in writing. This means they can fill in a form that they can get from their local authority and sent it to them within 14 days (this includes weekends and public holidays) of being told what their rating is.

The owner or manager of the business also has a 'right to reply'. This is different from an appeal. The owner or manager can fill in a form that they can get from their local authority to tell them how the business has improved hygiene or to say if there were unusual circumstances at the time of the inspection. A business's right to reply will be published online by the local authority with the business's hygiene rating.

Can the owner of a business ask the local authority to inspect hygiene standards again to get a new rating?

Yes, but only if the improvements to hygiene that the local authority food safety officer told the business about at the last inspection have been made.

The owner or manager of the food business can only ask the local authority once for another inspection to be carried out before the date of the next planned inspection.

To ask for another inspection, any food business can download a form from its local authority's page of the website.

I'm worried about the rating given to a shop where I've eaten and bought food. What should I do?

You should contact the local authority that gave the rating. The local authority details are also on any certificate or the on back of any sticker on show at the shop.

Why six tiers?

The decision about the best scheme for England, Wales and Northern Ireland was considered very carefully by the FSA Board in December 2008, following a major public consultation. In opting for six tiers, the Board took account of all views, and also the aim to enable consumers to differentiate between the food hygiene standards at premises where they eat or buy food, and the aim to provide an incentive to businesses for continuous improvement.

Why isn't it mandatory for businesses to display the score?

Mandatory display would require new legislation so the Agency is taking a voluntary approach at this stage, though this will be kept under review. The scheme will be promoted both locally and nationally to consumers so that they can understand and use ratings in making their choices about where to eat out or shop for food. As they become familiar with the scheme, they will come to expect ratings to be displayed and draw their own conclusions where they are not.

Why doesn't the scheme apply to businesses that process and supply food?

Principally it is a consumer information tool, so ratings will be given to food outlets where customers can make a decision there and then about where to go and eat or to do their food shopping.