

How to start a food business



A step-by-step guide for food business start-ups

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 your local municipal zoning and bylaws
- Step 3** Review safety codes and public health rules
- Step 4** Develop a 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

Home-based business

Low risk home-prepared food businesses may operate without a food handling permit. Read more about buying and selling low risk home-prepared foods at [Low-risk home-prepared foods | Alberta.ca](#)

Commercial food establishment

Owners of commercial food establishments must hold a valid food handling permit to operate. Commercial food establishments include bakeries, bars and lounges, butcher shops, cafeterias, caterers, convenience stores, delicatessens, high risk home-based businesses, mobile food units, restaurants, day cares and senior homes with more than 10 clients, and work camps.

Mobile food vending unit

Starting a mobile food business has unique considerations. Read more about mobile food vending units at [Mobile Food Vending Units \(albertahealthservices.ca\)](#).

Catering business

Caterers must prepare their food in an approved kitchen. Caterers without their own food establishment may get permission to use another approved food establishment. Complete this form: [Permission to Use an Approved Food Establishment \(albertahealthservices.ca\)](#).

Step 2: Confirm your local municipal zoning and bylaws

Confirm that your local municipal zoning and bylaws allow for your proposed business activity. Zoning and bylaws may prohibit certain commercial activities in residential areas.

Contact your local municipal office for more information on zoning and bylaws.

- For the City of Calgary call 3-1-1 or visit www.calgary.ca
- For the City of Edmonton call 3-1-1 or visit www.edmonton.ca

Step 3: Review safety codes and public health rules

Public Health Act and the Alberta Food Regulation

The Food Regulation establishes the construction, sanitation, hygiene, and operational requirements for your food business. You may view a copy of the regulation at <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/eph/Page3150.aspx>.

Building Code

The Building Code establishes the minimum standard for building safety such as fire protection, structural integrity, heating and ventilation, plumbing and other safety measures.

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

Fire Code

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, limitations of building contents and the establishment of fire safety plans.

Contact your local Safety Codes Officer or fire department for fire safety information and to request an approval inspection. The building in which your business will be located must comply with the Alberta Fire Code and ordinances.

Canadian Food Inspection Agency

CFIA establishes the labelling requirements for packaged food. Go to www.inspection.gc.ca for more information.

Step 4: Develop a plan and draw a layout

You must develop a plan for approval before starting construction of a new food business or before making any major alterations to an existing food establishment.

Major alterations include addition or changes to the physical facility, adding major equipment or changes to the plumbing or ventilation systems. Major alterations do not include redecoration, cosmetic refurbishing, 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 establishment areas
 - kitchen
 - food storage
 - washrooms
 - bar area
 - dishwashing
 - laundry room
 - serving stations
 - retail area
 - garbage area
- Identify location of all equipment
 - refrigerators
 - sinks
 - exhaust canopy
 - freezers
 - dishwashers
 - dipper wells
 - hot holding equipment
 - food equipment
 - cooking appliances
- Provide details and specifications for plumbing and lighting
 - sewer lines
 - floor drains
 - mop sink
 - grease traps
 - light fixtures
 - hot water systems
 - light covers
- Provide details and specifications for surface finishes
 - walls
 - baseboards
 - floors
 - countertops
 - ceilings
 - shelving
- Identify location and total number of seats
- List and describe all food items for sale. Include a copy of the menu
- Describe type of utensils customers will use (re-useable or disposable)

Note: Your food establishment may not include all equipment and areas listed or may include other items.

Step 5: Submit your plan to your local municipality and/or EPH office

For businesses within the City of Edmonton or City of Calgary, submit your plans directly to the city planning department. The City will circulate a copy of your plans to your local Environmental Public Health office.

Call 3-1-1 or visit www.edmonton.ca or www.calgary.ca for more information.

If your business is outside the City of Edmonton or the City of Calgary, submit your plans to your local public health inspector. Visit www.ahs.ca/eph to contact your local office.

Submit your plans at least 6 weeks in advance of when you want to start construction.

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.

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.

For more information, visit calgary.ca/FOG or call 311.

Step 6. Get your building permits and start construction

Some municipalities require building permits to start construction. Make sure you check with your local municipality to determine the local requirements. Once you have approval from EPH and from your local municipality you may proceed with building or renovating your food establishment.

In Calgary, a building permit will be mailed to you or can be picked up in person at City Hall. You should also start your business license application at this time.

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

Contact your local Environmental Public Health Office at www.ahs.ca/eph if you have any questions during construction and/or to schedule an on-site inspection to ensure you are meeting health requirements.

Once construction is complete, and equipment is in place and operational, operators must contact Alberta Health Services for an initial approval inspection.

Be advised other agencies may require additional information prior to approval. They will review the plans and specifications to determine whether your food business meets their Codes.

Step 7: Register in an approved food safety-training course

The Alberta Food Regulation requires that at least one person in care and control of a food facility be certified in food safety. Here is a list of Alberta approved certificates:

<https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/health-recognized-food-safety-courses-alberta.pdf>.

When six or more food handlers are working on-site (this includes serving staff) a certified person must be at the facility. When five or fewer food handlers are working on-site, the certified person may be off-site.

Alberta Health Services strongly recommends food safety training for everyone who handles food, but does not require food safety certification for the following food establishments:

- Bed and breakfasts
- Convenience, grocery stores, and food facilities that handle pre-packaged foods only
- Farmers' market vendors
- Temporary food booths at special events
- Social care facilities, like daycares and senior homes, serving less than 10 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](#). Submit your completed application to your local Environmental Public Health office at least 14 days prior to your proposed open for business date.

A public health inspector will contact you to arrange an on-site inspection. Prior to the initial inspection, make sure that all construction is complete, all equipment and fixtures are in place and operating, and the premises is clean.

Food handling permits are not transferable to new owners of a food establishment. New owners must apply for a new food handling permit two weeks prior to taking over the operation and must contact Environmental Public Health to arrange a date and time to conduct an inspection prior to opening.

Step 9: Prepare for an approval inspection

Use this checklist to prepare for your approval inspection:

- Construction or renovations are 100% complete
- Facility and all equipment are clean
- Cooler unit temperatures at 4°C / 40°F or less
- Freezer temperatures less than 0°C / 32°F (ideally less than -18°C / 0°F)
- A thermometer in each cooler and freezer
- At least one probe thermometer (capable of measuring temperatures between 0°C and 100°C) is available for staff to use
- 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
- Dishwasher plumbed and fully functional and sanitizing cycle checked
- Separate plumbed sinks for handwashing, dishwashing, and food prep
- Food grade sanitizer
- Test strips for each type of sanitizer
- A written cleaning schedule
- A written pest control plan
- Food safety training certificates for supervisors
- Approved ventilation or exhaust canopy
- Shatterproof light fixtures
- Smooth, durable, and washable floors, walls and ceilings in food preparation areas
- Sealed floor-wall joints
- No pests and doors / windows constructed to prevent the entry of pests
- Watertight garbage containers in food preparation and washroom areas

Step 10: Pay your Food Handling Permit Fee

EPH will email you an invoice for the food handling permit fee once the approval inspection is complete. Charitable organizations and food businesses that only sell pre-packaged low-risk food do not pay permit fees.

EPH will email you your food handling permit after your food handling permit fee is paid. Print the permit, protect it with a transparent cover, and post it in a place where the public can see it. Your food handling permit is valid for one year. To keep your food handling permit valid, you must pay an annual renewal fee.

A public health inspector will conduct regular routine inspections of your food establishment after you hold a food handling permit. Please follow the rules of the Food Regulation and Public Health Act at all times.

Schedule of Fee for Food Handling Permits

Class I Food Handler (\$100):

Food handlers that process, sell or manufacture non-perishable or pre-packaged products with minimal food handling and processing.

Class II Food Handler (\$175):

Food handlers that are only involved in limited handling, processing, manufacturing, selling or packaging of raw ingredients and cook or prepare foods to order. Hot and cold holding of high-risk food is restricted to single meal service.

Class III Food Handler (\$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 Food Handler (\$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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