

Preparing for an EHO Visit

A practical toolkit for businesses



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Preparing for a visit from the EHO

Do you dread a visit from the EHO? Fearful they will arrive just when something has gone wrong, a customer is complaining or you are already feeling under pressure?

In this brief guide, GH Training Solutions provides a straightforward outline of the simple steps you can take before and during an inspection to ensure you have the best possible chance of receiving a good report and a high score, so you can embrace the prospect of a visit, instead of fearing it.



The 3 P's of an EHO Visit

The purpose of a visit from the EHO is simply to assess how well your business is complying with the law in 3 areas - your Premises, your Practices and your People & Policies.

At the end of the inspection, the food safety officer will provide your business with a rating between 0-5. The top rating of '5' means that the business was found to have 'very good' hygiene standards. Any business should be able to reach this top rating.

PREMISES

The condition of the structure of the buildings – the cleanliness, layout, lighting, ventilation and other facilities including pest control

PRACTICES

How hygienically the food is handled – how it is prepared, cooked, re-heated, cooled and stored

PEOPLE & POLICIES

Confidence in Management - how the business manages and records the steps it takes to ensure that food is safe including staff training

Before the Visit

There is no mystery behind an EHO visit; we know what they will be looking for before they arrive. You know you will receive an inspection at some point, so it makes sense to have the processes and policies in place all of the time - so you are always ready for a visit.

Based on the 3 P's of the inspection above, take a tour of your own business today and run through this simple check list on the next page to assess how ready you are, and identify any areas which might need attention.

Pre-Visit Checklist:

Your Premises: Look around you with fresh eyes and ask yourself these questions;

- Is the building structurally sound? Is there any way pests could get into the building? Check for gaps under doors, damaged or missing fly-screens or damaged plumbing. Make sure any external vegetation is cut back.
- Is the internal structure sound, in good condition and easy to clean? Is the floor peeling away from the edges? Are any joins in flooring allowing water and debris to seep underneath and collect? If you have noticed flaking paint or cracked tiles inform your maintenance contact.
- Are you pest free? Check under units, look for signs of nests, droppings or damage. Don't forget to check electrical cupboards, under bench seating in restaurants and other areas which are seldom opened or moved. If signs of pests are seen, contact your pest removal contractor immediately.
- Are basic utilities in place? Is there hot and cold water available? Do the sinks drain easily? Is there sufficient lighting? Are all glass bulbs in food rooms covered by a diffuser?
- Is there adequate ventilation and extraction to ensure good temperature control for safe working conditions for staff?
- Is all equipment in good condition and clean? In particular, consider difficult to clean items such as the inside of ice machines and door seals and check areas that are difficult to see, such as microwave roofs. Feel handles of fridges; can you feel dried-on debris?
- Have you got separate sinks for washing hands and for food and equipment? Is it clear which sink is for which task? Is there enough handwash? Check the hot water - it should be hot, but not scalding.

Your Practices: Review at all aspects of food storage and preparation from delivery to service.

- Are clear and easy to follow contamination controls in place? Is there a clear segregation between raw and cooked processes, clean and dirty processes and between allergens and allergen-free foods? Are staff working to these standards by using the correct area, following colour-coding and washing hands regularly?
- Is there good temperature control of food? Is chilled food kept in the fridge and frozen food in the freezer? Is any food left at ambient? If so, for how long? If food is being cooled, how is this being done and how long is it left out for?
- Is food cooked or reheated to an adequate temperature to kill bacteria? Once cooked is it served straightaway or held at the correct temperature?
- Is labelling clear and understood by the team? Is all food labelled and in date? Check for signs of relabelling. Does labelling show that stock rotation is taking place?

People & Policies: Do your practices reflect your policies? Does your documentation back up your practice? Do you demonstrate 'Confidence in Management'?

- Have you documented your best practices? Have you shared these with the team and any new joiners? Is your staff's understanding of 'good practices' the same as yours?
- Do you have an allergy policy in place? How easy is it for customers to obtain information about potential allergens in their food? Is it up-to-date and accurate? Do staff know where to find it and how to use it?
- Is contingency planning in place for staff to follow? Does your team know where to find the plans and when to implement them?
- Have staff members received the appropriate level of Food Safety training including food allergens? Do they understand the consequences of food contamination? Do you have evidence of training? Are qualifications still in date?
- Are good practices followed every day by your team? How confident are you that your team on duty today would be managing food safely if you weren't there?

During the Visit:

Once you have completed the 3P's pre-visit checklist you will feel far more relaxed and confident about an inspection.

When the food safety officer does appear, it's only natural to feel nervous. However, it is important to keep calm and not become panicked and flustered as the EHO will be trying to understand your business and will need you to answer their questions.

Here are a few Do's and Don'ts to help the visit run smoothly:



DO:

Be welcoming, confident, open and natural. Focus on showing them what you do, rather than trying to hide what you don't.

Accompany them on the visit. This way you are on hand to point out locations of safety features, answer their questions, explain what you do and introduce them to key personnel.

Take notes. Record the questions they ask so you can refer to this in the future, and note down any suggestions or observations they make.

Manage the team during the walk round.

Gather all policy documentation together to make it easy for the EHO to review.

DON'T:

Delay, try and put them off, or ask them to come back later.

Make excuses or try to hide anything; you will simply look suspicious.

Complete records retrospectively. This is fraudulent and could even be illegal.

After the Visit:

Make sure you read the EHO report carefully and take note of any red-flags raised. Draw up an action plan for each red flag to show what steps you need to take to address these points and assign deadlines or responsible people to each step.

Log what you do at every step, this will help you demonstrate progress and move towards gaining the top score.

Currently, in England there is no legal requirement to publicly display your score. However, if you are trying to keep your score hidden, don't forget that the ratings are published freely on <https://ratings.food.gov.uk> and customers can easily research you.

It is better to put your effort into gaining a FHR score you are proud to display, rather than spend time trying to conceal a poor one.

Still Nervous?

If you feel you could benefit from some advice or support in preparing for an EHO visit or you realise that you need some training for your staff, please contact GH Training Solutions for a confidential and obligation-free chat.

GH Training Solutions offer Highfield-accredited and non-accredited courses which can be tailored to your business. We can run courses in-house at a time to suit you, or smaller groups or single team members can join one of our public courses.



For more details or an informal conversation, please contact me - Ghislaine Hughes on the details below.

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