



Title: Iowa Food Establishment Licensing and Plan Review

Effective Date: 11/03/2025

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## FOOD ESTABLISHMENT REQUIREMENTS

### LAWS AND REGULATIONS

- Iowa follows the [2017 FDA Food Code](#) (with the 2019 Supplement). It complies with [Iowa Code 137F](#) and Iowa Administrative Codes [Chapter 30](#) and [Chapter 31](#). These regulations govern food establishments.
- Refer to Chapter 4 of the FDA Food Code for equipment requirements. For plumbing and water needs, see Chapter 5. Chapter 6 provides details on physical facilities. Refer to the table of contents to find the section on operations and procedures.
- All licensed facilities must follow State and Local Fire, Plumbing and Building Codes, including mechanical ventilation. If you have any questions, please contact your local agencies.
- A pre-operational inspection and approval is required before opening for business.
- Mobile Food Units need to meet the requirements for [mobile food operations](#).

### LICENSING

- An application for a license must be submitted 30 days before opening the food establishment. [Apply for your license here](#).
- A license application for the intended operation must be on file with the Department prior to a plan review.
- A Food Establishment needs an inspection and approval to open.
  - After the application is processed, an inspector will be assigned. Then, a pre-operational inspection may be done to approve the license. Operating without an approved license will result in a penalty fee. This fee will be the same as the original license fee. It could also lead to closure of your operation. Penalty fees must be paid before a license can be issued. Once issued, a license is valid for one year from the date of approval.
- **The following items should be submitted with the License Application:**
  - Menu- including seasonal menus
  - [Certified Food Protection Manager Certificate of Completion](#). (when applicable)
  - Standard operating procedures, including:
    - [Employee Health Policy](#) (Refer to the linked document or create a similar one. Ensure it includes all the necessary information; reference the [U.S. Food & Drug Employee Health and Personal Hygiene Handbook](#).)
    - Clean up Procedures ([specific to your facility](#)) for vomit or diarrhea incidents. ([Info to help create your procedure](#))
    - HACCP Plans for [Specialized Food Processes](#). (when applicable)

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### PLAN REVIEWS

- Submit [plan reviews](#) for new construction and remodeled facilities. The plan review process may take up to 30 days from the date of submission.
  - Email any plans not submitted with the license application to [fcs-plans@dia.iowa.gov](mailto:fcs-plans@dia.iowa.gov).
- When plans go through the review process, they should include, at a minimum, the following:
  - Intended Menu
  - Proposed establishment layout drawn to scale which includes:
    - Floor, wall, and ceiling finish materials and specifications.
    - The equipment layout including:
      - cooking and hot holding equipment
      - refrigerators and freezers
      - dish washing sinks/commercial dish machine
      - mop sink and food prep sinks
      - handwashing sinks.
    - Equipment specifications including:
      - Types and sizes need
      - Manufacturers make and model numbers
      - Installation specifications
      - Plumbing backflow connections
      - Mechanical ventilation (when required)

**Below is the list of facility and equipment needs.** (2017 FDA Food Code contains a complete list.)

**Demonstration of Knowledge:** FDA Food Code: 2-101.11, 2-102.11, and 2-103.11

- The permit holder must have a person in charge (PIC) present at the food establishment when it is open. The PIC should show that they understand food safety and how to prevent foodborne diseases. They should know HACCP principles and the FDA Food Code requirements.
- The PIC must demonstrate this knowledge by the following:
  - Compliance with the Code by having no priority violations during the current inspection.
  - Being a certified food protection manager.
  - Provide the correct answers to the inspector's questions about the food operation.

**Certified Food Protection Manager:** FDA Food Code: 2-102.12 and IAC Ch. 31.1(2)

- The facility must have at least one employee with supervisory duties who is a certified food protection manager. Some exceptions apply.



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### **Employee Health:** FDA Food Code: 2-201.11, 2-103.11

- Employees must report certain illness symptoms or diagnosed illnesses to the PIC.
- The PIC must report certain illness symptoms or diagnoses to the regulatory authority.
- A verifiable employee health procedure is required.

### **Clean-up of Vomiting and Diarrheal Events:** FDA Food Code: 2-501.11

- A food establishment needs written procedures for staff for dealing with vomiting or diarrhea. These procedures should be specific to their facility.

### **HACCP Plans:** FDA Food Code: 8-201.13, 8-2.1014, and 3-502.11

- When the establishment uses special processes to prepare food, it needs a HACCP plan and an approved variance. These methods include:
  - Reduced oxygen packaging
  - Curing
  - Acidification to prolong shelf life
  - Sprouting seeds
  - Fermentation
  - Smoking for preservation
  - Custom processing of animals.

### **Food Source:** FDA Food Code: 3-201.11

- All food items need to come from a licensed grocery store, food manufacturer, food supply company, or other approved source. Home-produced foods only qualify if made in a licensed home food processing establishment.
- Cottage Foods cannot be stored or sold in restaurants, grocery stores, mobile units, vending machines, or unattended food establishments.

### **Handwashing Facilities:** FDA Food Code: 5-202.12(A), and 5-204.11

- Handwashing sinks must have hot water of at least 100°F. They should be easy for all employees to access. Position hand sinks in all areas where food is prepared and served. They also need to be in dishwashing areas, and restrooms.

### **Warewashing:** FDA Food Code: 4-301.12, 4-301.13, 4-502.11, 4-501.112, 4-501.114, 4-501.116

- Facilities must clean and sanitize their dishes. A 3-compartment sink or a commercial dish machine can do this. Sink compartments should be big enough to fit the largest item being cleaned.



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- IAC 481-31.9: Facilities serving food and alcohol need dishwashing areas for each dish type. The kitchen and the bar area require a separate 3-compartment sink in each area. If a dish machine is used, it needs to be capable of handling dishes from both the food and the bar area. This is necessary if it is to replace both 3-compartment sinks.
- Drainboards, shelves, or tables should be available for clean sanitized dishes to air dry. Have areas available to hold dirty dishes until they can be cleaned and sanitized.
- Dish machines must be in good repair. Have an alternative plan to clean and sanitize dishes when the dish machine is not working.
- Dish machines need high heat or chemical sanitizing capabilities. They need automatic soap and sanitizer dispensers. These should be easy to see or have an alarm that sounds when they are empty or not working.
- Use a test kit and thermometer to verify sanitizer concentrations and water temperatures.

**Plumbing:** FDA Food Code: 5-101.11, 5-103.11, 5-202.11, 5-202.13, 5-203.13, 5-203.14, 5-203.15, 5-402.11

- IAC 137F.12: The plumbing system must meet the minimum state plumbing code or local plumbing code. The plumbing system should have a connection to a municipal water and sewer system. This includes grease traps.
- Drinking water must come from an approved source. This can be a public water system or a non-public water system. The non-public system should follow legal guidelines, and an annual well test must be on file. It needs to be built, maintained, and operated according to the law.
- The hot and cold-water sources should be able to meet the peak water needs of the food establishments.
- Plumbing systems, fixtures, and beverage dispenser carbonators, need proper backflow prevention.
- There should be at least one mop sink or curbed cleaning facility with a floor drain.
- Ensure that drains on equipment for liquid waste are safe from backflow.

**Restrooms:** FDA Food Code: 5-203.12, 5-204.11, 6-202.14

- At least one toilet must be available. If the law requires it, provide additional toilets.
- Place a restroom handwashing sink in or immediately next to a toilet room.
- Restroom doors should be tight-fitting and self-closing.

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**Equipment:** FDA Food Code: 3-306.11, 4-201.11, 4-204.16, 4-204.112, 4-301.11, 4-302.12

- Self-service operations must have proper sneeze guards over the serving lines.
- Cover Ice bins to prevent contamination.
- Equipment and utensils need to be durable and retain their key qualities when used as intended.
- Beverage tubing and cold-plate cooling devices cannot touch stored ice. The only exception is an ice bin cold plate.
- Provide thermometers in all refrigerated units, placed in highly visible locations.
- Facilities need enough equipment to hold hot and cold food. Equipment should quickly cool or reheat food. Food must be at the temperatures listed in Chapter 3 of the Food Code.
- Use thermometers to monitor food temperatures. Thermometers need a tip-sensitive probe for testing thin foods (such as meat patties).

**Surface Characteristics & Outer Openings:** FDA Food Code: 5-501.11, 6-101.11, 6-201.13, 6-201.16, 6-202.15

- The outdoor area for trash, recycling, and returnable items should be concrete or asphalt and slope for proper drainage.
- Standards for interior floors, walls, and ceilings:
  - Smooth, durable, and easy to clean.
  - Carpet must be closely woven and cannot be in the food prep or storage areas.
  - In moisture-prone areas, surfaces need to be nonabsorbent. (applies to walk-in refrigerators, dishwashing areas, restrooms, and mobile food service areas.)
  - Cover and seal floor and wall joints when using water-flush cleaning methods. Ensure that floor drains are available.
  - Wall and ceiling coverings in dry food storage areas should be easy to clean.
- Keep outer openings closed to stop insects and rodents. Take the following steps:
  - Fill or close holes and gaps.
  - Use closed, tight-fitting windows.
  - Install solid, self-closing, tight-fitting doors.
  - By other effective means.

**Ventilation:** FDA Food Code: 6-304.11

- When necessary, mechanical ventilation should prevent rooms from excessive heat, steam, or humidity. It also needs to control odors, vapors, smoke, and fumes.

For specific questions:

Email: [foodcode@dial.iowa.gov](mailto:foodcode@dial.iowa.gov)

Phone: 515-380-7491

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## FOOD ESTABLISHMENT REQUIREMENTS

**Storage:** FDA Food Code: 3-305.11, 3-305.12, 4-903.11

- Store prepared food and ingredients in the following ways:
  - In a clean, dry location at least 6 inches off the floor
  - Away from splash, dust, or other contamination.
- Food needs to be stored covered and may not be stored:
  - in locker or dressing rooms
  - in toilet rooms
  - in garbage rooms
  - in mechanical rooms
  - under unshielded sewer lines that might drip
  - under leaking water lines, including fire sprinkler heads, or under condensation lines
  - under open stairwells
  - under anything that could cause contamination
- Store clean equipment and utensils, linens, and single serve use items in the following ways:
  - Keep them in a clean, dry location.
  - Ensure they are not exposed to splash, dust, or other contamination.
  - Place them at least 15 cm (6 inches) off the floor.

**Lights:** FDA Food Code: 6-202.11

- use shatter-resistant light bulbs, or shield them in these areas:
  - Above exposed food
  - Near clean equipment, utensils, and linens
  - Around unwrapped single-service and single-use items

**Other:** FDA Food Code: 6-202.111, 6-202.112

- Food Establishment operations cannot take place in a private home, a living or sleeping room, or a space that opens into these areas.
- Living or sleeping areas within a food establishment must have full walls and solid self-closing doors to separate them from food operations.