



This Food Science Fact Sheet is one of a series compiled by Institute of Food Science and Technology, providing clear, concise and scientifically reliable information on key food science topics for consumers.

Food Hygiene Ratings

What is the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS)?

FHRS applies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It helps people choose where to eat out, or where to buy food, by providing clear information about the hygiene standards of a business. (1) Ratings are typically given to places where food is supplied, sold or consumed, such as:

- restaurants, pubs and cafes
- takeaways, food vans and stalls
- canteens and hotels
- food shops including supermarkets
- schools, hospitals and care homes

Scotland has its own Food Hygiene Information Scheme (FHIS), with 3 ratings: 'pass', 'improvement required' and 'exempt premises'.

Who carries out the FHRS audits?

Local Authority's food safety officers carry out audits. If people have concerns regarding food safety or food poisoning they should inform their local authority environmental health or food safety department.(2)

What is inspected at a FHRS review?

The officer will check:

1. How hygienically the food is handled: how it is prepared, cooked, reheated, cooled and stored
2. The physical condition of the business: including cleanliness, layout, lighting, ventilation, pest control and other facilities
3. How the business manages ways of keeping food safe: looking at processes, training and systems, to ensure good hygiene is maintained. The officer can then assess the level of confidence in standards being maintained in the future.

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What do the FHRS ratings mean?

The rating shows how well the business is doing overall, based on standards found at the time of inspection. The ratings can be found online and on stickers which can be displayed at a business premises. The reverse of the sticker, and the online rating, will also show the date of the inspection by the local authority's food safety officer.

The scheme gives businesses a rating from 5 to 0, with scores linked to hygiene practices.

5: hygiene standards are very good

4: hygiene standards are good

3: hygiene standards are generally satisfactory

2: some improvement is necessary

1: major improvement is necessary

0: urgent improvement is required.



Figure 1: Example of a FHRS with a score of 5

Food Hygiene Ratings

Where can a rating be found?

Ratings can be found online (4) and in many cases are displayed in an obvious location on the window or outer door of the premises.

Can a business be shut down for having a low FHRs score?

If the officer considers that the hygiene standards of a business are very poor, and that there is an imminent risk to public health, as food may be unsafe to eat, they must take action to ensure consumers are protected. This could result in stopping part of the business, or closing it down completely, until it is safe to recommence.

Is it mandatory to display the FHRs score?

In Wales and Northern Ireland it is mandatory to display the rating sticker, however currently it is only voluntary in England.

Finding details of inspection reports

Detailed information included in the food safety officer's inspection report can be obtained by making a freedom of information request.(3)

What if there is no FHRs score?

It could be that the business is not registered. Alternatively that it has not been audited, in which case information is on a food premises public register, held by the local authority which the business is registered with. This should be available online or by requesting access to such information.

What may change?

Currently allergen management is not included in the scheme, but this may be incorporated into the FHRs audit, in the future.



Figure 2: Example of a FHRs sticker with a score of 5 in a window of a food premises

Figure 3: Example of the reverse of a FHRs sticker label

References

1. Food Standards Agency (FSA): <https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/food-hygiene-rating-scheme>
2. Local Environmental Health Officer (EHO): <https://www.food.gov.uk/contact/consumers/find-details/contact-a-local-food-safety-team>
3. Information about inspection reports: <https://www.food.gov.uk/make-a-freedom-of-information-request>
4. FHRs online <https://api1-ratings.food.gov.uk/>
5. Making the most of your business' rating (FSA): <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/making-the-most-of-your-business-rating>

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