

Frequently Asked Questions

Food Handler Training in Illinois

The following answers are based on Public Act 098-0566 and proposed rules that are in the review process. Answers are subject to change.

Who is considered a food handler?

"Food employee" or "food handler" means an individual working with unpackaged food, food equipment or utensils, or food-contact surfaces. "Food employee" or "food handler" does not include unpaid volunteers in a food establishment, whether permanent or temporary.

Who is required to have food handler training?

Any food handler working in Illinois, unless that person has a valid Illinois Food Service Sanitation Manager Certification (FSSMC) or unpaid volunteer. If someone working in a facility is not a food handler on a regular basis, but fills in as a food handler when needed, they must have food handler training.

Who is NOT required to have food handler training?

Anyone working in a facility who is not a food handler by definition, unpaid volunteers or any food handler who has a valid Illinois Food Service Sanitation Manager Certification (FSSMC). Also, in the proposed rules, temporary food establishments also will be exempt from the food handler training requirement.

What type of training is required and by what date?

The first thing is to determine the category of the facility you work at, which is either a restaurant or non-restaurant.

Food Handlers Working in a Restaurant

What is a restaurant?

"Restaurant" means any business that is primarily engaged in the sale of ready-to-eat food for immediate consumption. Where "primarily engaged" means having sales of ready-to-eat food for immediate consumption comprising of at least 51% of the total sales, excluding the sale of liquor, as defined in Section 3 of the Food Handling Regulation Enforcement Act. For the purposes of this definition, restaurants would include concessions and other food service establishments where food is intended for immediate or on-site consumption.

What is the timeline for implementation?

All food handlers working in restaurants shall have training completed by December 31, 2014. Enforcement will be limited to notification and education from July 1-December 31, 2014.

What type of training is offered for restaurants?

Food handler courses with American National Standards Institute (ANSI) approval can be found on the ANSI website at: <https://www.ansica.org/wwwversion2/outside/ALLdirectoryListing.asp?menuID=212&prgID=237&prgID1=238&status=4>. The course and assessment can be completed online, 24 hours/day and does not need to be monitored by an instructor. Upon passing the assessment, the certificate is immediately available to print. A local health department that has a Department approved training program may provide training for restaurants. For a list of local health departments go to: <http://www.idph.state.il.us/local/alpha.htm>. In addition, any business with a training program approved in another state prior to August 27, 2013, may provide training if registered with the Department.

How is the training administered?

Training can be online, computer, classroom, live trainers, remote trainers and by certified food service sanitation managers. For those food handlers working in restaurants, the training must be ANSI approved, unless their local health department has been approved by the Department to provide food handler training to restaurants or they work for a business with a Department approved internal training program.

Will everyone receiving food handler training receive a certificate?

Not every food handler training course will issue a certificate, but proof of training must be available in the facility upon inspector request. ANSI approved food handler training courses will issue a certificate upon passing the assessment. The Department will provide a sample certificate upon approval that may be used by those with approved training programs.

How long is the certificate valid?

The ANSI food handler training certificates are good for three years and those taking other types of trainings that work in restaurants and other non-restaurant facilities, such as nursing homes, licensed day care homes and facilities, hospitals, schools and long-term care facilities, are good for three years.

Those working in non-restaurants, other than those listed above, are not required to take another food handler training unless they go to work for another employer. Food handler training for those working in non-restaurants is not transferable between employers.

Will my food handler certificate be valid throughout Illinois?

Restaurant food handler training certificates are valid throughout the state, unless the training was obtained at a business through a Department approved internal training program.

Who can teach food handler courses?

Anyone can teach food handler training courses. It is important to remember, it is not who is teaching the training, but that you receive the appropriate training based on whether you work in a restaurant or non-restaurant.

Food handlers in restaurants can take the following trainings:

- Food handler courses with ANSI approval can be found on the ANSI website at: <https://www.ansica.org/wwwversion2/outside/ALLdirectoryListing.asp?menuID=212&prgID=237&prgID1=238&status=4> The course and assessment can be completed online, 24 hours/day and do not need to be monitored by an instructor. Upon passing the assessment, the certificate is immediately available to print.
- A local health department that has a Department approved training program may provide training for restaurants. For a list of all local health departments go to: <http://www.idph.state.il.us/local/alpha.htm>
- Any business with a training program approved in another state prior to August 27, 2013.

Can a “train the trainer” approach be used, where one person attends a training and they go back and teach others within their facility?

No, this would not be acceptable for food handlers working in restaurants, because the food handler needs to receive the training themselves and be assessed by the approved training program provider.

Is there a set fee for the course?

No, the act states there has to be at least one food handler training option available for \$15.00 or less and there are multiple ANSI approved programs available online at that price.

Food Handlers Working in a Non-restaurant

What is a non-restaurant?

Non-restaurants are facilities, such as nursing homes, licensed day care homes and facilities, hospitals, schools, long-term care facilities and retail food stores.

What is the timeline for implementation?

All food handlers working in non-restaurants shall have training completed by July 1, 2016. Enforcement will be limited to notification and education from July 1-December 31, 2016.

What type of training is offered for non-restaurants?

Any food handler training course that has been registered and approved by the Department is acceptable for food handlers in non-restaurants.

How is the training administered?

Training can be on-line, computer, classroom, live trainers, remote trainers and by certified food service sanitation managers. For those food handlers working in restaurants, the training must be ANSI approved, unless their local health department has been approved by the Department to provide food handler training to restaurants or they work for a business with a Department approved internal training program.

Will everyone receiving food handler training receive a certificate?

Not every food handler training course will issue a certificate, but proof of training must be available in the facility upon inspector request.

How long is the certificate valid?

Those working in non-restaurants are not required to take another food handler training, unless they go to work for another employer or if they work in nursing homes, licensed day care homes and facilities, hospitals, schools or long-term care facilities. Food handlers working in those facilities must receive training every three years. Food handler training for those working in non-restaurants is not transferable between employers.

Will the state issue food handler certifications?

No, the state will not issue food handler certifications. The state will continue to issue the Food Service Sanitation Manager Certification (FSSMC).

Will my food handler certificate be valid throughout Illinois?

No, non-restaurant training is not transferable between employers.

Is the employer responsible for paying for food handler training?

No, an employer is not responsible for paying for food handler training, since it is the property of the certificate holder.

Who can teach food handler courses?

Anyone can teach food handler training courses. It is important to remember it is not who is teaching the training, but that you receive the appropriate training based on whether you work in a restaurant or non-restaurant. Food handlers working in non-restaurants can take any food handler training course registered and approved by the Department.

Can a "train the trainer" approach be used, where one person attends a training and then they are able to teach others within their facility?

Yes, the train the trainer approach could be used for those food handlers working in non-restaurants, but the training course being used must be approved by the Department and food handlers must take an assessment.

Common Questions Regarding Food Handler Training

Is there a set fee for the course?

No, the act states there has to be at least one food handler training option available for \$15.00 or less and there are multiple ANSI approved programs available online at that price.

Will volunteers be required to have food handler training?

No, only paid food employees will need to have food handler training.

If retail food establishments also have a deli or produce (cutting fruits and vegetables for trays/fruit salads) section, do the deli and produce employees, but not stockers/cashiers, need their food handler training by July 1, 2014?

Retail stores with delis would be considered non-restaurant and everyone meeting the definition of a food handler would need training. Non-restaurant food handlers need to have training by July 1, 2016.

If a grocery store has a bakery, deli, salad bar and coffee shop inside, is the grocery store considered a non-restaurant and the deli, bakery, considered restaurants?

A grocery store is a retail food store, along with other retail stores that sell clothing and housewares and are considered a non-restaurant even though they have multiple food operations under that same roof. If the retail store is the owner/operator of the food operations, then it is considered a non-restaurant as a whole. If the retail store has a food operation in it that is run by a third party, then that specific food operation would be considered a restaurant and the retail store would be considered a non-restaurant (only if it had other food handlers in that facility).

The act states that restaurants have to begin receiving handler certification after July 1, 2014, yet reading the FAQ sheet that was sent out it indicates restaurants shall have the training completed by July 1, 2014. We expect some of our places to read this and interpret it as they will not begin to require their employees to receive training until July 1, 2014. Which time is correct-training must be done after July 1 or have training completed by July 1?

Since the rules will not be approved by July 1, 2014, restaurants need to have food handler training completed by December 31, 2014. Enforcement is limited to education and notification July 1-December 31, 2014.

Are convenience stores that may only have hot dogs on a rotating grill as a food item classified as a restaurant or non-restaurant?

Convenience stores with gas stations would be considered non-restaurant. Those convenience stores that do not sell gas, only food items and have roller grills with food handling taking place could be considered a restaurant, but the local health department needs to decide this based on other items, such as lottery and cigarettes, that the facility might also sell along with ready to eat foods.

Do temporary or mobile food stands (cotton candy/corn dogs/shake-ups) require food handling certificates?

Mobile food-yes. Food handlers would need training.

Temporary food-no. Proposed rules will exempt temporaries.

If a "non-restaurant" food worker takes the same ANSI certified training as a "restaurant" food worker, does the "non-restaurant" food worker have to take the training again (even if still within the three-year valid time) if they go to work for a "restaurant"?

The food handler would not need to take the training again as long as the individual has their own ANSI certificate that they can use to work in a restaurant and the facility the individual is going to does not have an internal training program.

Will local health departments receive a list of food companies that have approved in-house training?

Once the Department approves a food handler training program, it will be listed on the Web portal for local health departments to access, under Retail Food/IDPH Approved Food Handler Training Programs.

Will places not permitted by local health departments, such as churches and clubs (Lions, Elks, Masonic lodges), require food handler training?

Yes, they would require food handler training for their employees. Most clubs should already be permitted by local health departments, since they have kitchens and serve the public. Volunteers are exempt from the training requirement.

If a church is just doing temporary events, they would not need food handler training, as temporaries are exempt from having food handler training in the proposed rules.

If a food service establishment is not inspected by the local health department, do they still need food handler training?

Yes, if the establishment falls under the Illinois Food Code and meets the definition of a restaurant or non-restaurant, any employee meeting the definition of a food handler would need food handler training.

Any ideas on how to verify the hundreds and hundreds of food handlers? I am assuming that will be the local health department's responsibility.

The Department will be addressing enforcement in the Illinois Food Code update and in its work groups. Enforcement is limited to education and notification until January 1, 2015 for restaurants and January 1, 2017 for non-restaurants. It will be up to the inspectors to verify food handler training, as they do now with FSSMC verification. Guidance will be coming from the Department on how to verify food handler training.

Do the mentally disabled working in a facility, restaurant or non-restaurant need to have food handler training?

Any food handler employed by a in a restaurant or non-restaurant must have training. There are several options for training (classroom, hands-on, DVDs, online) that can be used and the assessment can be taken multiple times, in most cases. We are proposing that, assessments can also be in the form of demonstration of knowledge, for those that are unable to take a written exam. Food handlers that are not paid employees would be considered volunteers and do not need training.

I am a food handler instructor with a program that was approved in Kane County. Can I use this program to teach anyone working in the state?

Beginning July 1, 2014, all food handler programs will have to be approved by the Department and Kane County will no longer have its own food handler training requirements. If you are an independent instructor and will be teaching for restaurants, you must use an ANSI accredited program and ANSI assessment. If you will be teaching for non-restaurants, then you can submit your training program with an application to the Department for approval.

For non-restaurants that can use a "train the trainer" approach to food handler training, how does that work?

The "trainer" would attend an approved food handler training and would then return to their facility and train the staff using that same approved training program and assessment.

Can an instructor teach a FSSMC course and a food handler training at the same time?

No, food handler training and FSSMC courses should be held separately since the training requirements are different for each type of course.

How do I submit a training program to the Department for approval?

An application with completion instructions is available on the Department's website under "Food Handler Training." Refer back to the sections in this document that list course options in "Who can teach food handler courses".

Can someone with food handler training take the place of a FSSMC when there is a gap in coverage throughout the day?

No, a food handler cannot take the place of a FSSMC. The Illinois Food Code still requires the FSSMC certification based on your facility's risk type.

Do delivery driver's need food handling training?

If the delivery driver does not have any food handling interaction (e.g., cutting the pizza before boxing) and only serves as a delivery driver (taking the box from A to B), then the driver would not need food handling training. If any type of delivery driver (e.g., pizza, school lunch, caterer) conducts any type of food handling (e.g., cutting, packaging) or is responsible for temperature control and cross-contamination, the driver would need to complete the food handling training.

Does a restaurant, by definition, selling less than 51% in total sales of ready to eat (RTE) food, excluding liquor, need to have food handler training? Or if they sell less than that 51% are they not required to have the training?

That definition of restaurant or non-restaurant is to determine implementation date and type of training needed. No food handler in Illinois is exempt from training unless they have a valid IL FSSMC or they are a volunteer or temporary employee. Food handlers in restaurants AND non-restaurants need training.

Are there training requirements set by my local county health department, beyond the state's requirements?

No, the regulation of food handler training is considered to be an exclusive function of the state and local regulation is prohibited.