

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 will also 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. See attached Food Handler Training Determination Tree.

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 an internal training program approved in another state prior to August 27, 2013.

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 attend a training and they go back and 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 all food handlers must take a written assessment.

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. Most clubs should already be permitted by local health departments since they have kitchens and serve the public.

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 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. 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 their 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 go back to their facility and train the staff using that same approved training program and written 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.

Food Handler Training Determination Tree

