

So, you want to run a food business?

A guide for Victorians

If you are thinking about buying an existing food business or starting your own, there are some important things you should know about. To protect Victorians, all food businesses must comply with our food laws, including the Food Act.

This booklet will tell you about:

- How Victorian laws, particularly the food laws, affect what you might be planning to do in your new food business,
- How to meet your obligations, and
- How you can easily get more help and information if you need it.

What do the food laws mean for me?

Every business that sells food in Victoria must be **registered** with the local Council Health Department. This applies even if you don't charge directly for the food, but include it as part of another service, such as for promotional purposes, tourist packages or at a Bed and Breakfast.

Making and selling food carries with it certain responsibilities. The food must be safe to eat and free of any contamination. Poisoning your customers is no way to stay in business.

Victoria's food laws are part of a national Food Safety Strategy which aims to have very similar food safety legislation across Australia. There are Food Safety Standards which you need to be familiar with.

They cover:

- What can and should be in foods,
- What must be included in labelling, and packaging, and
- How you manage food safety in your business,

among other things. You can get more information about the Food Safety Standards by visiting Food Standards Australia New Zealand website www.foodstandards.gov.au or by calling 1300 652 166.

Can I run a food business from home?

Preparing food for a number of people is different from cooking for the family. You will need to think about whether you can prepare safe food from home for the number of people you are planning to serve.

You need to be registered with your local Council to operate a food business from home.

If you are thinking about running a food business, one of your best resources is your local Council Environmental Health Officer. They can advise you on the changes you might need to make to your kitchen or premises to satisfy the legal requirements of running a food business.

Where do I start?

Preparing food for customers is different to preparing food for yourself and family. The amounts will probably be larger. The time between when you prepare the food and when it gets eaten might not be so predictable. You might have a customer who is allergic to some types of food.

There are a few things you should think about before taking the big step.

- What laws affect my plans?
- Do I know enough about making sure the food I make is safe?
- Will I need a building or planning permit from the local Council?
- Will the kitchen's layout, equipment and storage facilities be appropriate for doing the things I plan to do?
- Is there a place to wash my hands before I start preparing food?
- Is there enough room in the fridge to effectively store the amount of food I plan to make?
- Will everyone working at the business know how to make sure the food they handle is safe for customers?

One of the best places to start is with your local Council Environmental Health Officer. Whether you are thinking about buying an existing business, starting a new one, or even operating from home, your Environmental Health Officer can guide you towards making your dream come true, with the least amount of fuss.

Where do I register my food business?

If your business	then you register with
Sells, transports, or prepares mainly meat (like a butcher), or sells, transports, or prepares mainly fish or seafood (like a fishmonger)	Prime Safe They can be contacted on 03 9685 7333.
Sells, makes, transports, or prepares mainly dairy products (like a dairy or cheese maker)	Dairy Food Safety Victoria They can be contacted on 03 9810 5900 or at their website www.dairysafe.vic.gov.au
Sells, makes, transports, or prepares other foods or a range of foods (not meat or fish)	Your local Council.
Operates from mobile food premises like a hot dog or icecream van across several different Council areas	Check with each Council you are proposing to operate in about registration requirements.

What do I need to do to be registered?

As a condition of being registered, all food businesses (except for retail businesses selling low-risk pre-packaged food) must have a Food Safety Program.

A **Food Safety Program** is a simple plan that you can use to make sure your food is as safe as possible.

You will also need to name someone to be your **Food Safety Supervisor**. The Food Safety Supervisor needs to know about food safety, have the *ability* to supervise food handlers, and the *authority* to give directions if unsafe food practices are observed. (The only exception to this requirement is for charities and community groups which run one-off events to raise money for community and charity causes and not for personal gain. Check with your local Council.)

As well, you need to make sure that food handlers within your business have the skills and the knowledge of food safety and food hygiene for the work they do.

What is a Food Safety Program?

It is now a legal requirement for all food businesses to have a Food Safety Program in place **before** they open (except for retail businesses which sell only low-risk pre-packaged food, for example; newsagents selling packaged sweets).

A Food Safety Program is a written plan that shows how your business will manage the safety of the food you prepare, serve, manufacture or sell. It is your plan for serving safe food—which makes for a healthy business.

Food Safety Programs are based on the principles of HACCP (**H**azard **A**nalysis **C**ritical **C**ontrol **P**oint), an internationally accepted prevention and risk based food safety system. They need to be reviewed annually to make sure they are still relevant.

How do I get a Food Safety Program?

If you are planning to sell food to 'at risk' people (such as the very young, the elderly or the sick) then you will need to write your own Food Safety Program which must be audited by an approved Food Safety auditor. If you are a business that doesn't sell food mainly to 'at risk' people, then you can still write your own Food Safety Program and be audited, but a simpler option will be to use a user-friendly template to create your own Food Safety Program.

There are a number of templates to choose from. Some are specially written for particular types of businesses. Others are more general. To find out which templates are available you should go to the Food Safety and Regulatory Activities Unit's website www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety and look under Templates.

Some templates are free, and others must be purchased. If you decide to use a template, you should choose the one that is most appropriate for your type of business. Your local Council Environmental Health Officer can help you decide, and there's a brochure called *Three easy steps to using a Food Safety Program Template* available from your Council.

Whichever one you choose, the supplier of the template must offer you support to help you complete your Food Safety Program properly.

Many existing businesses already have a Food Safety Program in place. If you are buying an existing business, ask to see the Food Safety Program and if it is included in the sale of the business.

You should also check with the local Council to see if there are any existing Health Orders over the premises which need to be fixed before you can run a food business or you can ask the local Council Environmental Health Officer to do an inspection of the premises.

If you are planning to use an existing Food Safety Program for a business you buy, but are making changes to the things the business does, you'll have to review the whole Program.

What do I need to know about auditing?

If you do **not** use a template, but write your own Food Safety Program, your business will need to be audited at your cost by a Victorian Government approved Food Safety Auditor.

For more information about auditing, visit www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety or ask your local Council Health Department for a brochure on *Food safety auditing*.

What formal training do I need to do?

Everyone who handles food in your business needs to know how to do their job safely. There is no legal requirement for any person in a food business to attend a training course, but sometimes the best way of giving them this knowledge is to send them to a formal course, but other options include:

- On-the-job training under a more experienced staff member,
- Recognition of people's experience in food businesses,
- Self instruction using written material, and
- Running in-house training sessions.

You should record the type of training everyone receives in case your local Council wants to know.

The Food Safety Supervisor in your business may not need to attend formal training, but they **must** be able to prove that they have particular knowledge about food safety, by demonstrating certain competencies, which are set out under law. A Registered Training Organisation

can provide a Certificate of Attainment showing the relevant competencies. You will need to show the Certificate to your local Council Environmental Health Officer.

Visit www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety for more information or ask your local Council Health Department for a copy of *Food Safety Supervisors: skills and knowledge—A guide for businesses*.

What labelling do I need on packaged food?

There are uniform standards for the labelling of packaged food around Australia. If you import, manufacture or package food, you must know about these standards. They are contained in the Food Standards Code part 1.2 which you can find at www.foodstandards.gov.au

If you are going to produce packaged food for retail sale, there are fact sheets available from your local Council, and you should read the "Guide to labelling" under "Industry issues" on our web site www.foodsafety.vic.gov.au

To find out more

- Ring the Food Safety Hotline toll-free on 1300 364 352 during business hours.
- Speak with your local Council Environmental Health Officer for detailed food safety advice.
- Ring the Victorian Business Line on 13 22 15.
- Visit the FSANZ web site www.foodstandards.gov.au
- Look under *Catering and Food Consultants* in the Yellow Pages.
- Many Industry Associations provide advice about buying and selling businesses.
- visit www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety

Publications and resources

The Department of Human Services has a range of resources to assist food businesses with food safety including:

- a range of pamphlets and publications in English and other languages
- Food Safety Program Templates to guide the writing and implementation of Food Safety Programs
- FoodSmart, an on-line Food Safety Program Template (www.foodsmart.vic.gov.au)

Contacting us

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Food Safety and Regulatory Activities Unit
Address: GPO Box 4057
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Telephone: 1300 364 352
<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety>
Foodsafety@dhs.vic.gov.au

Other contacts

Prime Safe
P.O. Box 2057
South Melbourne Vic 3205
Telephone 03 9685 7333

Dairy Food Safety Victoria
PO Box 840
Hawthorn VIC 3122
Telephone 03 9810 5900
www.dairysafe.vic.gov.au

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