

## Investigation: food hygiene

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### Key points

- **The number of total overdue food hygiene checks in England, Northern Ireland and Wales stands at over 52,000 a year, according to a Freedom of Information request obtained by Unchecked.uk. This means that around one in seven planned hygiene checks of food premises are overdue. [1]**
- **Only 11 per cent of councils managed to carry out their planned food checks on time, while eight Local Authorities missed over 1,000 inspections of local food businesses.**
- **While there is 90 per cent compliance on food safety across all premises, nearly 80 per cent of highest risk 'A-rated' and 36 per cent of 'B-rated' food premises in England, Northern Ireland and Wales are failing to meet minimum food hygiene standards - such as cleanliness, correct handling of food, and temperature control - according to analysis of Food Standards Agency data by Unchecked.uk.**
- **Local Authority food law enforcement teams do essential work to keep people safe, but years of falling budgets and declining staff numbers risks undermining their efforts to ensure the UK's food safety regime is fit for purpose. Brexit is set to amplify these problems.**

### Context

All food establishments in the UK are risk-rated from A-E, according to how much of a hazard they pose to the public. The highest risk A-rated premises include businesses with a history of

hygiene or compliance problems; businesses supplying food to vulnerable customers, such as care homes; businesses with a large number of customers; and those handling raw meat or carrying out processes with a high danger of contamination. A food business with a higher risk-rating is inspected more frequently than a business with a low rating. [2]

The government-led Food Hygiene Rating System (FHRS), is used to assess food business hygiene levels. This scheme is mandatory for those in Northern Ireland and Wales, where businesses must publicly display their ratings, and voluntary for those in England. The ratings range from 0 to 5, where 5 is the highest rating, and 2 or below is considered a 'fail'. With regards to our findings, "failure to meet basic food standards" equates to businesses which achieved a hygiene rating of 2 or below.

Poor hygiene practices can greatly increase the emergence and spread of bacteria which can cause food-borne illness and food poisoning, such as Campylobacter, Salmonella and E. coli O157. These infections can be highly dangerous, posing the greatest risk to babies, young children, the elderly and the ill.

### What we found, in more detail

The findings reveal the extent of food hygiene failings in high-risk A- and B-rated establishments across the three countries in 2018/19. As well as the high number of failings in the very riskiest food businesses, a third (36.3%) of 'B-rated' establishments failed to meet basic hygiene standards. For context, this is out of 1,745 A-rated premises, and 20,759 B-rated premises. [3]

In England 81 per cent of A-rated premises and 37 per cent of B-rated premises are failing on food

hygiene (out of 1,605 and 18,889 premises respectively). In Wales 76 per cent of A-rated premises and 31 per cent of B-rated premises are failing on food hygiene (out of 118 and 1,444 premises respectively). In NI, 41 per cent of A-rated premises and 20 per cent of B-rated premises are failing on food hygiene (out of 22 and 426 premises respectively).

Meanwhile, a high number of planned local food hygiene interventions are overdue. While the total percentage of due checks achieved in England in 2018/19 increased marginally compared with the previous year, there were decreases in Wales and Northern Ireland (where planned interventions fell by 1.3 per cent and 4.2 per cent respectively). 11 per cent of councils managed to carry out all their planned food checks on time, while eight Local Authorities missed over 1,000 inspections of local food businesses. [4]

## NOTES

[1] This number is for total overdue food hygiene interventions of rated premises in England, Northern Ireland and Wales in 2017/18.

[2] The inspection frequency per risk category is below:

Risk Category	Score*	Intervention frequency
A	≥ 92	At least every 6 months
B	72 to 91	At least every 12 months
C	52 to 71	At least every 18 months
D	31 to 51	At least every 24 months
E	0 to 30	A programme of alternative enforcement strategies or interventions every 3 years

\* In Wales the score for Risk Category C is 42 to 71 and for Risk Category D is 31 to 41

[3] Annual Report on Local Authority Food Law Enforcement for England, Northern Ireland and Wales, 2018/2019. Overall, 90.7% of all food businesses achieved compliance in 2018/19 - around the same level as the previous year.

[4] Annual Report on Local Authority Food Law Enforcement for England, Northern Ireland and Wales, 2018/2019.