

**Below is correspondence received from WECHU on Business Licensing – received on March 14, 2025**

[“https://www.wechu.org/your-health/food-safety/business](https://www.wechu.org/your-health/food-safety/business)

There are about 2,600 food premises inspected in Windsor-Essex County. These food premises range from full service restaurants, churches and catering vehicles. In 2015, ‘Ontario’s Guidance Document for the Risk Categorization of Food Premises’ was released by the Ministry of Health. The guidance document outlines risk factors and associated weights for each factor resulting in an overall score for each food premise. Based on this score, every food premises is assigned a risk level of high, moderate or low. This risk level then deems how many times per year the premise requires inspections as set out in the Ontario Food Safety Protocol.

A Public Health Inspector assesses the risk level of a food premises every year during an inspection. The risk level is given based on the likelihood that a food-borne illness outbreak could occur from the food served at that premises. For food premises which provide foods to vulnerable or at-risk people, have previous infractions, have extensive food handling, etc., it is more likely that harm could be caused to the public. In these cases, these food premises require more frequent inspections to ensure the public is safe.

Risk levels (High, Moderate, or Low) are assigned based on a variety of factors, each weighted differently:

**Population Served**

Vulnerable and at-risk populations (elderly, immunocompromised, children) are more likely to experience serious complications from eating contaminated food. Those food premises serving these clients (e.g., Hospital, long- term care home, retirement home, daycare, etc.) will require more frequent inspections.

**Preparation and Serving**

The likelihood of contamination increases with the amount of food handling and steps involved in the preparation of food (assembling, cooking, cooling, reheating, etc.). Those premises which have many steps in food preparation are higher risk than those serving only prepackaged foods. Full-service banquet halls and premises where food is primarily catered off site also have an increased risk for food-borne illness.

**Compliance**

Compliance with the Ontario Regulation 493/17 Food Premises is also weighted in the overall risk categorization score. Public Health Inspectors review inspection reports for the previous 12 months and determine if infractions were observed. Those with infractions are higher risk for foodborne illness outbreaks than those with no observed infractions.

### **Food-borne Illness/Outbreaks**

If the premises has been confirmed as the source of a foodborne illness or outbreak related to improper food handling in the past 12 months, the premises is weighted a higher risk.

### **Food Safety Management Plan**

If a documented food safety management plan is warranted but not in place, the premises is at a higher risk for foodborne illness outbreak. For premises with management plans in place, they are at a lower risk.

### **Food Safety Knowledge and Training**

Premises where food handlers are not demonstrating safe food handling practices are higher risk. For those who have certified food handlers on site, they are at a lower risk. Learn more about our [certified food handler course](#).

**Once the assessment is complete, the PHI will categorize the premises into one of the 3 risk categories and inspect it accordingly:**

- **High risk food premises:**

A premises which has a high likelihood of a food-borne illness outbreak occurring and are required to be inspected at least once every 4 months.

- **Moderate risk food premises:**

A premises which has a moderate likelihood of a food-borne illness outbreak occurring and are required to be inspected at least once every 6 months.

- **Low risk food premises:**

A premises which has a low likelihood of a food-borne illness outbreak occurring and are required to be inspected at least once every 12 months.

According to [O.Reg 493/17 Food Premises](#), anyone who plans to open a new food premises or re-open after renovating a food premises in Windsor-Essex County MUST notify the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit. Call the Environmental Health Department at 519-258-2146 ext. 4475 to provide information about the premises DURING construction and BEFORE opening, or complete the [Food Premises Inspection Request Form](#).

Its important to note that municipal licensing of food premises is a very important strategy that can support the compliance outcomes within food premises. Without proper licensing protocols that require WECHU sign off we may not know about a food premises opening (its incumbent on the operator to notify us per the above). With municipal licensing requirements for a WECHU approval, we learn about premise opening early and can support safe operations from the start.”