

When Do I Need a Food Permit?

While many child care providers use caterers for meals and snacks, some providers are still unsure as to what constitutes food service and when a permit is required. This information aims to provide some clarification on that issue.

Licensed child care centers typically must have a food service permit from their local Health Department if they prepare food on site. The Kentucky State Retail Food Code spells out the conditions. The food code states that if a facility: 1) engages in some degree of food preparation on the premises, and 2) offers the prepared food for consumption; then they must obtain a food permit.

Food preparation includes heating, reheating, cooking, chilling, cutting or otherwise processing food. Any one of these activities would require a permit to operate a food service establishment. So, if a provider cuts up vegetables or prepares a salad, the facility would need a food permit. For instance, if you use utensils, like knives, and clean and sanitize those utensils on site prior to use or re-use, that constitutes food preparation and requires a permit.

If you clean and sanitize bottles, sippy cups, or containers for food, you also need a permit. Keeping food in a refrigerator and/or hot storage unit and either dispensing or portioning out that food using your own utensils requires a permit as well.

However, dispensing simple non-perishable items such as store-bought crackers and granola bars **does not** require a permit.

We realize that these conditions are rather strict, but children's immune systems are not fully developed, making them more susceptible to food-borne illnesses. Following proper food safety practices is one way you can protect the children that you care for.

If you have specific questions about practices in your facility and whether a food permit is required, please contact your local county Health Department.