

Guide to Starting a Food Business

LARIMER COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT

Contents

3	Understanding the Requirements
4	Creating Your Plan
5	Selecting Equipment
5	Tables
5	Food Shields
5	Hot and Cold Holding
6	Sinks and Warewashing
7	Grease Interceptors
8	Ventilation
8	Dry Food Storage
8	Chemical Storage
8	Employee Areas
8	Lighting
8	Surfaces
8	Toilet Facilities
9	Planning for Disease Prevention
9	Employee Training and Illness Policy
9	Maintenance Services
9	Storage
10	Cleaning
10	Processes
11	Submitting Your Plan for Review
11	Requirements
12	Review Process and Timeline
12	Fees
12	Letter of Approval
13	Planning for Your Opening Inspection
13	Scheduling
13	Requirements
13	Application and Fee Payment

We want you to have a successful business! This guide is for anyone involved in the planning and construction of retail food service facilities, including architects, contractors, restaurant equipment suppliers, food service operators, and kitchen designers.

Our goal is to provide guidance for designing and constructing food facilities to be efficient, easy to clean and maintain, in order to support good food safety practices. Additional information and resources is available at <https://www.larimer.org/health/safety-sanitation-programs>.

Understanding the Requirements

Nearly every new or significantly altered facility serving or selling food or beverages in Colorado must submit plans to the local health department before a license can be issued. Larimer County Department of Health & Environment reviews plans for facilities in Larimer County to make sure that the design and equipment in a facility are suitable for the safe storage, preparation, and service of the foods on the proposed menu.

The following types of facilities must create and submit a plan to Larimer County Department of Health & Environment. Applications for each type of facility are available at <https://www.larimer.org/health/safety-sanitation-programs>.

New facility: New construction and facilities that have never been licensed as a food operation in the past.

Extensively remodeled or altered facility (examples include):

- Increased seating capacity by 20%.
- Changed or altered non-public areas that result in a reduction or increase of total space by 25% or more.
- Alterations requiring a building permit by local authorities.
- Diminished capability to handle food and utensils in a sanitary manner, creating potentially hazardous conditions.
- Significant changes in the menu.
- Extensive equipment changes.

Change of Ownership: Retail Food Establishment licenses are non-transferrable. A change to the Colorado sales tax number and/or change of ownership require new ownership to contact the Health Department to obtain a new food establishment license.

Mobile Units and Pushcarts: Retail food establishment that is a wheeled vehicle, trailer or cart that is readily moveable and designed for the service of food from the interior of the unit that is intended to physically report to and operate from a commissary for servicing, restocking, and maintenance each operating day.

Special Events: Organized recurring events or celebrations including farmers markets, stadium sports events, and ongoing street fairs.

Temporary Event: A single community event or a celebration that operates for not more than 14 consecutive days (may include town celebrations, fairs, and festivals). Temporary events do not include:

- a. Regularly scheduled series of events at venues such as sporting arenas, concert halls, flea markets, or farmers' markets.
- b. Events serviced by licensed caterers.
- c. Sporadic promotional events such as grand openings.

Other Requirements

Wholesale: Wholesale/Food Manufacturing operations sell their goods to other businesses who then sell the product to the final consumer. If you plan to sell goods as a wholesaler, you must register with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and/or the FDA (Food and Drug Administration). If you plan to sell goods as a wholesaler and directly to the public, you may **be required to obtain approval from Larimer County Department of Health & Environment and by CDPHE**. Wholesalers/Food Manufactures will need to submit plans and specifications to Larimer County Department of Health & Environment for evaluation and possible review.

Cottage Foods: The Cottage Foods Act allows limited types of food products that are non-potentially hazardous/non-Time/temperature control for safety food (i.e. do not require refrigeration for safety) to be sold directly to consumers without licensing or inspection. However, cottage food items may not be stored, used, or sold in retail food establishments. Contact CDPHE at 303-692-3645 or visit <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/cottage-foods-act> for more information.

Creating Your Plan

Plans are reviewed to ensure that the equipment, facilities, and design will be adequate for the food items you plan to serve and/or sell at the facility. Alterations to the plans are commonly required, and any construction started prior to approval could result in unexpected costs and delays.

Start with the Menu and Procedures

Every business is unique. What will be required is based on the space and equipment needed to store, prepare, and serve the foods on your menu safely. Retail stores such as a **grocery store may not need the facilities and equipment that a full-service restaurant would need**, just as small operations may not need as much equipment as larger operations would require.

Start by developing the menu and operational procedures including the type, amount, and variety of foods you'll serve and the operational procedures you'll follow to store, prepare, and serve foods. This will determine the food preparation, storage, refrigeration, and serving equipment needed and help you develop the ideal kitchen layout, including the floor plan, equipment, ventilation and plumbing needed.

Adequate provisions will be necessary for handwashing, cooking, cooling, thawing, reheating, cold-holding, hot-holding, and warewashing associated with the menu and operational procedures. *Special processes such as sous vide or vacuum packaging may require additional information and approval.*

In general:

- Plan for adequate space; do not sacrifice necessary food preparation, storage and dishwashing space to provide "extra room" for customers.
- Plan for an orderly and efficient flow of food storage, preparation, and serving areas and for moving soiled and clean dishes and utensils to and from the dishwashing area to minimize contamination throughout the facility.
- Consider your entire floor plan. All areas of the facility used for the storage, preparation, or service of food or drink, and areas used for other facility operations including storage of equipment, single-use items, and linens must meet the requirements of the Colorado Retail Food Establishment Regulations. This includes attic spaces, basements, outbuildings, restrooms, and other areas where storage and operations take place.

Selecting Equipment

This section outlines the equipment you may need to open your food business.

All equipment used for a retail food operation should be listed as commercial and should be certified by a recognized testing agency. This will ensure it is constructed of materials designed and fabricated for food safety and meets American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standards or comparable design criteria. Household equipment should not be used. Equipment approved as NSF, UL Sanitation, ETL Sanitation, or BISSC meet commercial requirements.

Preparation Tables

Preparation tables must be smooth and easily cleanable, tight-jointed, and have moisture-proof surfaces. Cutting boards must be made of approved materials.

Food Shields

Display stands, buffets, and salad bars must have food shields to prevent contamination by customers. Food shields are intended to intercept the direct line between the customer's mouth and the food being displayed to prevent contamination by the customer.

Hot and Cold Holding Equipment

Plan for enough hot-holding units to store all hot foods during peak demand. When determining the size and type of refrigeration units, consider storage before preparation as well as after preparation, food preparation and assembly processes. Refrigeration must be adequate to store all cold foods during peak demand, allowing for separation of raw foods from ready to eat, and enable proper cooling parameters to be met. Point of use refrigeration is required in all areas where cold foods are prepared and served.

TIP

Beverage display refrigerators are not designed for cold holding of potentially hazardous foods/time/temperature control for safety food. A data plate will describe the type of food and/or beverage the unit is designed to hold.



PREPARATION TABLE



FOOD SHIELD



HOT HOLDING EQUIPMENT



COLD HOLDING EQUIPMENT

Handwashing Sink

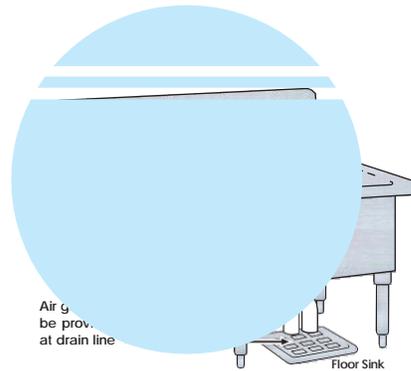
All facilities are required to have hand washing sinks that are easily accessible for employees involved in food preparation and warewashing. Sinks must be equipped with soap and disposable towels or hand dryers, hot and cold running water, and hand washing signage.



HANDWASHING SINK

Food Preparation Sink

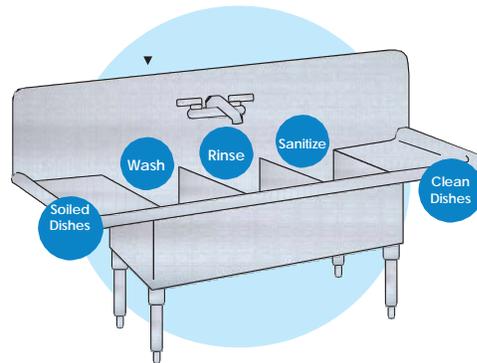
A separate sink should be provided for the preparation of produce and other foods. Food preparation can include washing, soaking, thawing, and using ice baths for cooling. If a food preparation sink is not available, you may be limited to using only prewashed produce.



FOOD PROCESSING SINK

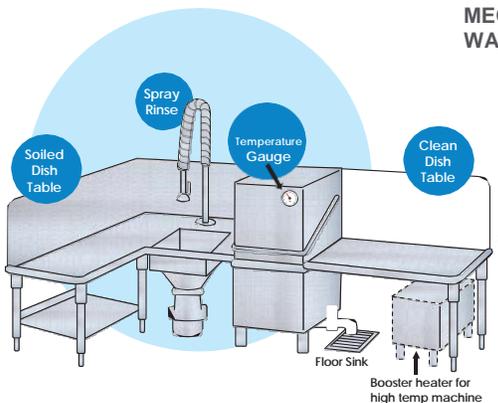
3-compartment Warewashing Sink

A three compartment sink is required in a facility that sells or serves unpackaged food. The 3-compartment warewashing sink basins must be large enough to accommodate all equipment used in food preparation and storage. Mechanical warewashing machines may also be installed but not in place of a 3-compartment warewashing sink.



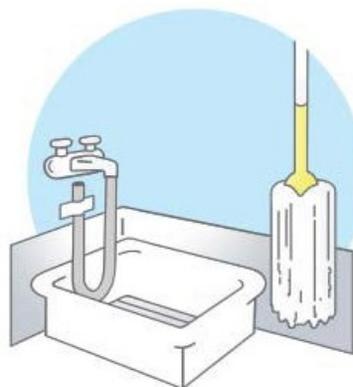
3-COMPARTMENT SINK

MECHANICAL WAREWASHING SINK



Utility (Mop or Service) Sinks

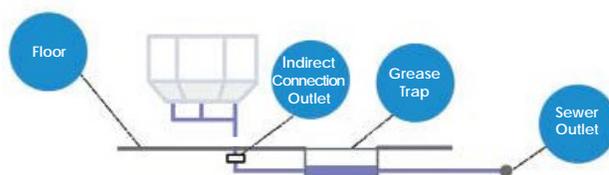
All facilities are required to have a utility sink designated for cleaning mops and tools, and for disposal of mop water. A curbed sink is the ideal option since they make it easier to dump mop water and are a good storage spot for the mop bucket when not in use.



UTILITY SINK

Grease Interceptor (Grease Trap)

A grease trap is a device that is attached to sinks and/or drains to prevent fats, oils, and grease from flowing to the sewer system. Grease traps are not required to comply with health regulations; however, many waste water jurisdictions may require them. When installed, they must be easily accessible for cleaning, and located outside of kitchen, warewashing, and storage areas. It is recommended that they be located outside the facility.



GREASE TRAP

TIP

Grease traps must be cleaned periodically to keep them working properly. An indoor grease trap may need to be cleaned monthly or quarterly, while a larger outdoor unit may only need cleaning once or twice per year.



Ventilation

Sufficient ventilation must be installed to keep rooms free of excessive heat, steam, condensation, vapors, noxious odors, smoke, and fumes. Larimer County Department of Health & Environment evaluates when, where, and which type of exhaust hoods (Type I or Type II) must be provided.

Dry Storage

Enough designated space must be available for storage of food, dishes, and equipment, including bulk foods, cans, and other items. All food items must be stored at least 6" off floor to prevent contamination.

Chemical Storage

Chemicals must be stored below and/or away from food items, equipment, and utensils to prevent contamination. Chemicals cannot be stored above the 'clean side' of the 3-compartment warewashing sink.

Employee Area

Lockers, shelving, or a designated area must be provided for employee belongings. Personal belongings such as coats, purses, cigarettes, and phones cannot be kept in food areas.

TIP

The employee area is also a great location for employees to store their beverage cups or food.



Lighting

Lighting must be bright enough to allow for safe work conditions and to facilitate cleaning. Lights must also be shielded when above food or food preparation areas to prevent contamination in the event of breakage.

Surfaces

All floors, walls, and ceilings in food areas (service, storage, or preparation) must be finished to be smooth and easily cleanable. Every facility must submit a finish schedule with plan review. Below are approved surfaces that are commonly used.

- **Floors:** quarry tile, ceramic tile, poured epoxy
- **Walls:** stainless steel, FRP, glossy painted drywall, filled and painted concrete block
- **Ceilings:** vinyl coated ACT (drop ceiling), glossy painted drywall
- **Base Coving:** tile, rubber

TIP

Avoid using painted drywall and wood, due to lack of durability. Better to use FRP on wall and wire metal shelves.



Toilet Facilities

Conveniently located toilet facilities with mechanical ventilation must be provided that are accessible to employees and patrons without allowing patrons access to food preparation areas, storage areas, or warewashing or utensil storage areas.

Planning for Disease Prevention

The Centers for Disease Control estimates that every year in the U.S. 76 million people get sick, more than 300,000 are hospitalized, and 5,000 die from foodborne illnesses. To ensure food is safely prepared and does not bring illness to your customers, include the following items in your plan; you may be asked about them during future inspections.

Employee Training and Illness Policy

The top 3 causes of foodborne illness are attributed to poor personal hygiene by food service workers, improper holding temperatures, and improper cooling procedures. Training food handlers in food safety is the best way to reduce foodborne illness. Develop the following:

- A training program to formally train your staff about food safety.
- The food safety practices that will be covered during staff orientation.
- An overview of your employee health policy, including how you will handle sick workers, procedures for cleaning vomit and diarrhea, and how you will let employees know about your policy.
- Hand hygiene and glove use policies, including how to address cuts and wounds.
- Establishments will need to employ a Certified Food Protection Manager that has supervisory and management responsibilities.

Processes

To be sure food remains safe, make sure you have processes to:

- Date mark ready-to-eat food products.
- Ensure that a 'first in, first out' system is used for foods.
- Ensure foods are properly thawed by making sure there is enough cooler space to allow for overnight thawing.
- Properly cool large amounts of leftover food by using shallow pans, ice wands, or other necessary cooling equipment.
- Monitor temperatures, including when temperatures will be taken, how they'll be recorded, and who will be responsible.
- Prevent bare hand contact with ready to eat foods, such as using gloves, tongs, utensils, deli paper, or other tools.

Equipment Maintenance

Determine who will:

- Provide preventative maintenance for your refrigeration and hot holding equipment.
- Provide support and maintenance for your dishwasher.

Water Service

Ensure you have enough hot water capacity for the busiest time of day.

Cleaning

There are several things you can do to prevent the amount of future maintenance necessary for your facility and provide ease of cleaning:

- Construct floors, walls and ceilings with the most durable materials that are smooth and easily cleanable.
- Consider stainless steel on the walls behind cooking equipment.
- Place heavy equipment on casters, such as cooking equipment and refrigerators, so that it can be moved easily. This makes it easier to clean behind and between equipment.
- Avoid sealing equipment to walls, instead brace and set equipment away from walls and other equipment.

Submitting Your Plan for Review

Nearly every new or significantly altered facility serving or selling food or beverages in Colorado must submit plans to the local health department before a license can be issued. Larimer County Department of Health & Environment reviews plans for facilities within Larimer County to make sure that the design and equipment in a facility are suitable for the safe storage, preparation, and service of the foods for the proposed menu or food list.

Applications

Applications for a plan review differ, based on the type of food operation you are proposing. Visit <https://www.larimer.org/health/safety-sanitation-programs/food-safety-program/license-plan-review-information> and select the plan review application appropriate for your business.

Requirements

The plan review application includes instructions for what must be included for review. Missing information will delay the plan review process. Information to provide when submitting your plans should include:

- a. Plan review application form.
- b. A brief written description of the scope of work and what changes/construction will occur.
- c. Menu or list of foods prepared on the premises. Plans cannot be approved without submission of a menu or list of foods.
- d. Floor plan drawn to scale consisting of equipment and fixtures. The set of drawings should be approximately to ¼ inch scale or larger. Floor Plan
- e. All areas of the facility used for the storage, preparation, or service of food or drink, and areas used for other facility operations including storage of equipment, single-use items, and linens must be included with the floor plan.
- f. Plumbing schedule showing location of all fixtures, floor drains, floor sinks, supply lines, drain lines, and backflow prevention devices.
- g. Ventilation schedule, including exhaust capacity (CFM ratings) of all hoods, location of all hoods, and detailed shop drawings of all hoods (including length and width), location of all make-up air registers, including CFM ratings for outside air.
- h. Lighting plan.
- i. Equipment list showing make and model numbers, and installation methods.
- j. Finish schedule detailing materials for all floors, wall, ceilings, counters, shelves, etc.
- k. Site plan, including streets, alleys, entrances, and outside dumpster location.
- l. Fixtures requiring hot water.
- m. Water heater location, make and model number, capacity, recovery rate, BTU or KW input, and hot water requirements.
- n. Chemical and personal storage.
- o. Employee hygiene plan.
- p. Employee illness policy.
- q. Vomiting and diarrhea event cleanup procedures.
- r. Food Protection Manager Certification.

Review Process and Timeline

Larimer County Department of Health & Environment will notify you via email within 10 business days after receiving your application packet to inform you if your plans are complete and can be fully reviewed

- If your plans are *not* complete or approved you will need to submit revised plans so a second review can be conducted.
- Once your plans are approved, contact Larimer County Department of health & Environment for construction inspections that should occur throughout the construction process.
- A final opening inspection must be conducted and all payments for license and plan review fees must be collected prior to approval for operation.

Approval of plans does not constitute acceptance of the completed structure. It also does not waive the responsibility of the owner or contractor to make necessary changes that may be required if the facility is not in compliance with the applicable requirements.

Individual Owners and Sole Proprietors

All licenses, certifications, and registrations issued to individual owners or sole proprietors must be accompanied by verification of citizenship. Verification includes completing an affidavit **and providing** a copy of an approved identification. This requirement does not apply to you if you are not an individual owner or sole proprietor.

Fees

Plan review and license fees vary depending on the type of plan review and license required. The license fee and plan review fees collected at the opening inspection when the facility is approved and the licensing paperwork is completed.

Letter of Approval

Construction of the facility may not begin until you have received a written plan approval from Larimer County Department of Health & Environment. The letter will include any requirements and stipulations required prior to beginning construction work; be sure to notify others involved in the project, especially the construction manager, of these requirements and stipulations.

TIP

Arrange for a pre-opening inspection 14 days in advance of the date of the intended inspection. Allow 5 working days to schedule an opening inspection.



SERVICE	BUILDING DEPARTMENT	PHONE
Building permits and inspection	Larimer County	970-498-7700
	Fort Collins	970-416-2341
	Loveland	970-962-2638
	Berthoud	970-532-2643
	Wellington	970-545-3502
	Windsor	970-545-3502
	Timnath	970-545-3502
	Estes Park	970-577-3726
	Johnstown	970-587-4664

Sales Tax Number Issuance Colorado Department of Revenue

Liquor licensing Colorado Liquor Control

Wholesale operations licensing Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

Planning for Your Opening Inspection

An onsite inspection of the facility must be conducted by Larimer County Department of Health & Environment prior to approval for operation. If the facility is approved at the opening inspection, the paperwork will then be completed to issue the retail food license. Retail food facilities, once approved and operating, must maintain ongoing compliance with regulatory requirements.

Scheduling

Arrange for a pre-opening inspection fourteen (14) days in advance of the date of the intended inspection. Please allow five working days to schedule an opening inspection.

Requirements

The following is required prior to the opening inspection of a retail food operation:

- Complete construction/Installation: All construction/installations must be complete and in full compliance with the Colorado Retail Food Establishment Rules and Regulations, and all applicable local regulations. Multiple inspections may be required to ensure full compliance prior to approval.
- Fully Operational Equipment: All refrigeration units must be fully operational and be able to maintain the required cold holding temperature. Dish machines must provide adequate sanitizer concentration and/or reach minimum final sanitizing rinse temperature. Sanitizer must be provided for all manual cleaning and wiping cloths.
- Test Equipment: All required test equipment must be provided, including accurate thermometers for refrigeration units, hot holding units, and mechanical dish machines; an accurate metal stem food thermometer with a 0°F to 220°F temperature range; and appropriate test kits for sanitizer.
- Operational Sink Areas: All hand washing sinks must be provided with hot and cold water, soap, paper towels, and a trash can.
- Clean and Operational: Establishment must be clean and operational.
- No Food Stored or Prepared. No food storage or preparation is allowed until approval from the Health Department has been attained.

License Application and Fees

A license application must be completed and fee(s) paid at the time of the opening. Be prepared to provide the following:

- State sales tax number
- Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN)

The license is renewable annually and is valid from January 1 through December 31.

- Fees are not prorated and are non-transferable.
- A separate license is required for each facility/unit.
- Fees vary depending on size and type of operation

