RiverStone Health | Public Health

Summer 2025

Boiling Point!

News for Licensed Food Establishments

Contact Us

Protecting Public Health through food protection and food safety education

Cheers to a beautiful Montana summer!

We hope we didn't just jinx this gorgeous weather we have been having for the past few months - sunshine, brief rains, happy gardens, and perfect patio weather remind us why we choose such a special part of the country to live, work, and play. We hope your summer is off to a great start.

Pest Protection in Food Establishments

Like humans, pests also enjoy summer weather. Pests can pose serious risks to food safety, including contamination of food, equipment, and surfaces with harmful germs. In Montana, pests like cockroaches and rodents thrive in food establishments if they find access to food, water, and shelter. By taking proactive steps to eliminate the resources pests need to survive, you can reduce the risk of contamination and avoid costly pest-related shutdowns.

Step 1. Prioritize good sanitation process. Ensure that food is properly stored, trash is disposed of regularly, and all areas of the facility are cleaned thoroughly and frequently to eliminate food and water sources for pests.

Step 2. Inspect your establishment for entry points, like gaps in doors, windows, or walls, as pests can enter a building through holes the size of a quarter. Even simple

actions, such as sealing cracks and keeping doors closed, can help prevent pests from finding shelter inside your establishment.

Pest control in food establishments is everyone's responsibility, from managers to kitchen staff. Any pest sightings should be reported and addressed immediately. Establishing a strong partnership with a pest control professional is essential for managing pest issues before they become infestations. By staying on top of pest control, you help ensure both the safety and reputation of your establishment.

Clarifying Mobile vs. Brick and Mortar Licensure

If you have been in Yellowstone County for a while, you may have noticed the rapid growth of mobile food establishments and kiosks around our community and particularly within Billings. What started as a handful of convenient coffee and soda stands has blossomed into more than two dozen establishments. Kiosks can be licensed as either a mobile food establishment, which is a unit that is on wheels and roadway ready, or a retail food establishment that is brick and mortar, connected to water and sewer systems. Over the years, Environmental Health Services staff have worked with these entrepreneurs to try and get creative and flexible to balance the needs of businesses with food safety requirements outlined in Montana's Food Code. Moving forward, any business seeking to be licensed as a mobile food establishment must meet the explicit intent and definition found in the Food Code included below:

> *Mobile food establishment" means a retail food establishment that serves or sells food from a motor vehicle, a nonmotorized cart, a boat, or other movable vehicle that periodically or continuously changes location and requires a servicing area to accommodate the unit for cleaning, inspection and maintenance.*

Kiosks that have been approved as mobile establishments in the past will be grandfathered into the mobile classification. However, kiosks will need to comply with the definition if they change ownership or location. For more information on this change, please read our **letter to operators.**

If you are considering opening a kiosk or mobile establishment, please consult with our department prior to investing in your business. We are here to serve as a resource and look forward to working with you to safely expand food and beverage offerings in our community!

For information on licensed food establishments and planning resources, please visit RiverStoneHealth.org/Restaurants

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Image source: Hawaii State Department of Health

Update: Food Establishment Grading Pilot Project

In March, we shared that Environmental Health Services staff were considering the adoption of a food establishment grading project in hopes of making inspection results easier to understand and more accessible to everyone. Over the past several months, we have collected feedback on the project through surveys, focus groups, consultation with other communities, and a volunteer steering committee. Your input has been invaluable and we are excited to launch our pilot in late summer 2025. Below is a brief summary of our community engagement and input we have received:

Community Engagement:

- Environmental Health Staff Survey
- Consumer Survey
- Owner Survey
- Focus group with members of the Montana Restaurant Association Board
- Steering Committee #1, which included members of the public, local food establishment owners and operators, and Environmental Health Staff

Key Findings:

- Most survey respondents check for reviews or inspection results sometimes if not always before eating out, especially if they have not eaten there before
- Reviews are easier to find and understand than inspection results
- Inspection results should be posted on the health department website and the

business entrance
- While survey respondents suggested letter grades would be best, focus group and steering committee participants recommended a stoplight system
- Staff should do more to educate the public on inspection processes and results
- All respondents agreed a "grading" system would improve the level of attention paid to food safety and would ultimately reduce foodborne illness
- It would be great if we can find a way to recognize consistently top performers

Staff are currently designing signage and criteria using the stoplight approach requested by stakeholders. Once these are complete, we will develop staff guidelines and public informational materials to help with our pilot. Our next steering committee will be held in late August/early September, and we will launch the pilot shortly after.

If you would like to participate in our next steering committee or pilot project, let us know by emailing environmental.hea@riverstonehealth.org

How'd we do?

We are constantly trying to serve you, our operators and licensed establishments, to the best of our ability. Please fill out our Environmental Health Services Customer Service Survey at the button below.

Thank you!

EHS Customer Service Survey

Visit our Website

RiverStone Health | Public Health

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