

Hygiene Rating & Safety of Food

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The food regulator has now introduced a voluntary scheme called Hygiene Rating Scheme for food service establishments. The scheme is a technology-driven and user-friendly where food establishments are given a rating on a scale of 1-5, where 5 indicates Excellent compliance and 1 indicates poor compliance of food hygiene and safety standards. It is going to benefit everyone as a whole because improved hygiene standards means fewer instances of food-borne illnesses.

Eating out has become a regular ritual for many of us. Some of us eat out of necessity and many of us out of choice. Today's fast-paced lifestyle and increased mobility, particularly among the younger generation, leaves little time for preparing and eating meals at home. Therefore, many of us are increasingly opting to eat out or have our food delivered from eating joints especially at workplaces, colleges or during travels. Apart from this, social events and celebrations are also increasingly being held outside the home, where food from outside has become a focal point of enjoyment. With the advent of multiple international cuisines and a large number of fine-dining places and world-class restaurants offering both variety and high quality of food, a large number of people choose to eat out for pleasure. In addition, thanks to an evolving social culture centered on coffee shops and restaurants, eating out has become fashionable, especially for youngsters.

While we love to eat out, can we be sure if the food we eat is safe or not? Given the frequency of eating out these days, it is important to assure consumers that the food they eat is safe and hygienic for consumption no matter where they eat. Moreover, a tropical country like India with a hot and humid climate is susceptible to food spoilage and contamination from bacteria that thrive in such a climate. Both food handlers and consumers often lack awareness on basic food safety, hygiene and sanitary practices leading to consumption of unsafe food. This results in food-borne illnesses, which affect a large number of people in India. Thus, food safety is of utmost importance. After all, food that is not safe is not food.

So, how do you know that the place where you eat serves safe food? The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has come out with a solution to help you make the right food choices. As the apex regulatory food authority in the country, the mandate of FSSAI is to ensure safe and wholesome food for all 135-crore citizens of the country. The Food Safety and Standards Act (FSS), 2006, specifies general hygiene and sanitary practices to be followed in food service

establishments in Schedule-4, FSSAI ensures that these are implemented through various regulatory, training and capacity-building and compliance measures. To make it easy for consumers to make informed choices about the food they eat, FSSAI has now introduced a voluntary scheme called Hygiene Rating Scheme for food service establishments.

The Hygiene Rating Scheme is a technology-driven, user-friendly scheme where food establishments are given a rating on a scale of 1-5, where 5 indicates Excellent compliance and 1 indicates poor compliance of food hygiene and safety standards. The rating are displayed in form of symbols i.e. smileys. This scheme encourages food businesses to ensure high standards of hygiene and sanitation and allows consumers to make informed food choices. This scheme is currently applicable to restaurants, cafes, bistros, diners and other eating-places, sweet shops, bakeries and meat shops.

9 Steps for getting a Hygiene Rating for FBOs

1. Ensure that your food business is licensed/registered by FSSAI.
2. Register on the Hygiene Rating Portal (<https://fssai.gov.in/hygieneRating/home>)
3. Carry out a self-assessment based on the checklist and make improvements accordingly.
4. Appoint one Food Safety Supervisor (FSS) for every 25 food handlers. The FSS should be trained and certified under FSSAI's Food Safety Training and Certification (FoSTaC) programme. The FSS in turn should train all food handlers.
5. Ensure that finished products are tested at least annually by NABL accredited lab notified by FSSAI (only for licensed FBOs).
6. Display the 'Food Safety Display Board' in the premises.
7. Get a third-party audit done from an FSSAI empanelled audit agency.
8. Based on the verification, a Hygiene Rating Certificate displaying scores will be generated.
9. Display the certificate prominently at the premises.

Statistics for Hygiene Rating

- Total FBOs enrolled: 3600+
- Total Hygiene Rating Audit Agencies: 40+
- Total No. of Auditors: 185+

It also includes interfacing with e-commerce platforms such as food delivery services and apps to encourage their associated eating places to adopt the scheme.

How does the scheme operate?

A comprehensive checklist has been created based on the criteria a food business needs to meet hygiene and sanitation standards laid in Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. The food business is then audited based on this checklist and awarded a rating by a third-party audit agency empanelled by FSSAI. A certificate is generated based on this rating and displayed for consumers at the premises. This helps consumers identify if the place is hygienic or not. A rating of 3 stars and above is considered a 'Good Rating'.

This Hygiene Rating is helpful for both food businesses and consumers. Through this rating process, food businesses have the opportunity to understand the basic criteria for ensuring safe food and implement these practices through training and capacity building



of their food handlers. Moreover, food businesses that are compliant can showcase their efforts to consumers by displaying this certificate prominently at the premises. This gives them a competitive edge over other businesses and wins the trust and loyalty of their consumers.

For consumers, this rating is a helpful tool to easily identify if the food being served is safe or not. This empowers consumers to make informed choices and exercise their right to choose a place to eat not only on the basis of taste and service but also health. It also plants the idea of food safety and hygiene in the minds of consumers, making those who are unaware also cognizant of the importance of food safety when they eat out. Overall, such a scheme benefits everyone as a whole because improved hygiene standards means fewer instances of food-borne illnesses among citizens overall, better health and productivity of people, reduced burden on the healthcare system and ultimately growth and development of the economy and the country as a whole.

So next time you visit your favourite restaurant, be sure to check its Hygiene Rating. If it doesn't have one, you can encourage the restaurant to get one. You will then be able to enjoy your favourite food without worrying about an upset stomach. Other customers will also benefit from this initiative. **MS**