

# Special Events – Frequently Asked Questions

## **Q1: I am organizing an event where there will be food. Do I need a Food Handling Permit?**

**A1:** Generally, the Alberta Food Regulation AR 31/2006 requires that anyone “handling” food intended for public consumption obtain a food handling permit unless they qualify for specific outlined exemptions. Exemptions are granted to Community Organization Functions, Special Events and Farmers Markets as defined in the Food Regulation, provided the requirements outlined in the Regulation under these categories are met.

- As defined in the regulation, “handle” refers to supply, sale, offering for sale, processing, preparing, packaging, displaying, serving, dispensing, storing or transporting of any food that is intended for public consumption.

## **Q2: What is a special event?**

**A2:** Under the Alberta Food Regulation, a special event means an event open to and where food is made available to the general public that operates for not more than 15 days within a calendar year in Alberta and includes, without limitation:

- fairs
- festivals
- exhibitions
- promotional events
- carnivals

## **Q3: What is a community organization function?**

**A3:** Under the Alberta Food Regulation, a community organization function means an occasional function open to the general public at which food is provided for attendees by volunteer caterers, where the function is run by a community organization exclusively for the purpose of raising funds for the operation of the community organization or for another social or charitable purpose, including but not limited to:

- community sports events
- fall harvest suppers
- wild game dinners
- a business holding an event for purposes of raising monies for a charitable entity
- charitable organizations hosting an event for purposes of raising monies for their charity

However, this does not include a community organization function operated as part of a special event.

**Q4: What about wild game dinners, are there any specific requirements that I need to follow?**

**A4:** Yes, foods brought to these events are generally not from an approved source, meaning the animal was not killed and butchered in a licensed abattoir (i.e. meat cutting operation). Organizers of a wild game dinner need to register their event with Alberta Health Services and keep a record of all the foods served at the event. The organizer of a wild game dinner will need to discuss their event with a public health inspector before the dinner takes place. For more information on wild game suppers, please go to our website at: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-standards-for-wild-game-dinners.pdf>.

**Q5: What is a restricted function?**

**A5:** A “restricted function” means a function that is:

1. run by a community organization or an individual, exclusively for the benefit of the members of the organization or the individual’s family, and
2. not open to the general public.

A restricted function is where attendance is by personal invitation, and food is provided for attendees by volunteer caterers, including, without limitation:

- meetings
- retreats
- family reunions
- weddings
- company gatherings

**Q6: What is a bake sale?**

**A6:** This means the sale of low risk foods (i.e. meaning foods that do not require refrigeration) by a community organization exclusively for the purpose of raising funds for the operation of the community organization or for another charitable purpose. This does not include a bake sale operated as part of a special event. It is important to note that:

- if additional foods are made available to the public that are high risk foods such as perogies, cabbage rolls, cream pies, or other foods requiring refrigeration; or
- the food is being sold for a profit and the revenue generated is not going back to a community organization,

Alberta Health Services (AHS) would no longer consider it a bake sale. This event is now considered a special event or community organization function (see definitions above). For more information on Alberta Health Services guidelines for bake sales, please go to: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-bake-sale-guidelines.pdf>.

**Q7: Do I need to contact AHS if I am having a special event, community organization function, restricted function, or bake sale?**

**A7:** The Alberta Regulation requires an organizer of a special event or a community organization function to notify AHS. We ask that special event organizers complete and return our *Special Event Organizer Notification* form thirty (30) days prior to the event. We also ask that organizers of community organization functions, contact us at least fourteen (14) days prior to the function to discuss any details of the event. This will ensure that the organizer and EPH have a common understanding of the event and activities taking place.

Provided you meet the definition outlined above for a restricted function or a bake sale, you would not be required to notify AHS.

**Q7: If I am only organizing a bake sale or a restricted function, where would I get more information on what I can do to make sure that I handle food safely?**

**A7:** AHS Environmental Public Health (EPH) website has a number of different resources to help you handle food safely. Please go to: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/eph/Page8302.aspx> and click on the “Special Event” drop down menu. This will provide you with the information you are looking for. If this does not answer your questions, please feel free to call your local Public Health Inspector, and they will be able to help you.

**Q8: I obtained a special events license from my municipality; do I still need to notify AHS of my event?**

**A8:** Although public health inspectors try to work closely with municipalities and other regulatory bodies, it is still the responsibility of the event organizer to notify AHS of a planned special event. Each government agency will review different components of your event. While AHS is often in communication with municipalities about different events, timelines may not always align to allow for a smooth flow of your event applications through the various departments. To prevent any complications with your event, please submit your notifications to AHS.

**Q9: What is involved as part of the notification process?**

**A9:** AHS asks that you fill out a notification form for either a special event or a community organization function. You can obtain a copy of the application forms by going to our website at: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/eph/Page8302.aspx> or by contacting your local Public Health Inspector:  
<https://maps.google.ca/maps/ms?msid=214014883873999552124.0004eb8dcc64907c5b7a6&msa=0>

**Q10: What is the purpose of contacting AHS?**

**A10:** Like you, we want to make sure that your event or function is a success. By notifying AHS of your event, public health inspectors can:

- answer any questions you may have or provide information to ensure food safety concerns are addressed in advance of the event taking place.
- ensure that you meet all requirements of the *Food Regulation* and the *Nuisance and General Sanitation Regulation*.
- grant you the necessary exemption if you do not require a Food Handling Permit.
- review safe food handling procedures, washroom requirements and general sanitation concerns with you that will help prevent problems the day of your event or function.

**Q11: How soon before my event do I have to contact AHS?**

**A11:** The sooner the better. EPH asks organizers of events to contact their local public health inspector:

- at least 30 days before the event takes place, to ensure an appropriate information package is provided and any pre-event questions are answered.
- at least 14 days before the event takes place to carry out any final planning actions and/or activities (e.g. confirm or obtain additional clarification of the requirements).

**Q12: Do I have to fill out all the boxes in the notification form?**

**A12:** Yes you must complete all the sections of the notification form. If you are unsure what the question means, call your public health inspector for clarification. A properly complete package will require less amount of time from both AHS and you to ensure that important information is provided. An incomplete form leads to delays that could impact the timing of your event.

**Q13: Do I have to do anything different if I am providing liquor at my event or function?**

**A13:** If you are applying to the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC) for a liquor license, you may be required to obtain an approval from your Public Health Inspector to include with the AGLC application. Under these circumstances, you must advise us of this requirement, and submit your required AHS notifications to us early to facilitate processing and meet your AGLC deadlines. You are still required to give us notification in advance, and our public health inspectors will help you through the process leading up to your event. When serving alcohol at your event, make sure that you understand the requirements of each government agency, and follow their timeframes for notification.

**Q14: Is there a guidance document that Organizers of a Special Event can refer to in order to help them understand and follow AHS requirements?**

**A14:** Yes, EPH has developed a Special Event Organizer Package that walks the organizer of an event through the necessary steps to meet the requirements of the provincial legislation. The packages can be found at:  
<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-special-events-organizer-package.pdf>

We also ask our organizers to direct vendors to our website for the special event vendor package and notification form:  
<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-special-events-temporary-food-establishment-vendor-package.pdf>

**Q15: What about people who will be serving food at a special event that I am organizing? What are their requirements?**

**A15:** All vendors at a special event are required to submit notification to AHS. This way, EPH can make sure that vendors understand what is required of them before the day of the event (i.e. prevent any surprises from taking place).

If mobile vendors are going to be part of the special event, hold a current and valid Alberta Food Handling Permit, and are going to operate solely according to the terms of their permits, then they do not need to complete the vendor notification. As the organizer, you would have given us a list that includes their name, decal numbers and means of contacting them as part of the organizer notification. EPH may follow up with them if required. However, if mobile vendors plan to operate differently at the special event, then they must complete the vendor notification. Ask your public health inspector if you are still unsure.

We ask our organizers to direct vendors to our website for the special event vendor package and notification form: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-special-events-temporary-food-establishment-vendor-package.pdf>

EPH has developed an easy to follow approval checklist that the food vendor can review to ensure they have completed the necessary requirements. It can be found at: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-approval-inspection-checklist-for-special-events.pdf>

**Q16: Is AHS only worried about food at my special event?**

**A16:** Like you, EPH wants to take all necessary steps to ensure your event is a success. While food is one component of a special event that EPH looks at, EPH also looks at the following to ensure provincial legislative requirements are achieved during and after the event:

- Potable Water – ensuring a safe water supply is available.
- Washroom Facilities – numbers of toilets (permanent and/or temporary), access to toilets, handwashing facilities, and maintenance of washroom facilities.
- Liquid Waste – safe and sanitary disposal of waste water.
- Solid Waste – numbers and location of garbage receptacles, maintenance/disposal of garbage.
- Personal Services - face painting, tattoo and piercing services, massage, henna and other-emerging or trending personal services.
- Petting zoos and animal displays – location, handwashing facilities, and maintenance of the zoo animal waste.
- Monitoring and control of illness or communicable diseases that could be linked back to a public gathering, such as a special event.
- Any unique risk that may be identified from review of your notification (e.g. setting up a kiddie pool activity for children to play in).

**Q17: Is there a guidance document that Organizers of a Community Organization Function can refer to in order to help them understand and follow AHS requirements?**

**A17:** Yes, we have a Community Organization Function Package that helps organizers through the approval process. This document can be found at:  
<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-community-organization-functions-package.pdf>

*For more information, please contact your nearest Environmental Public Health office.*

Edmonton Main Office  
Calgary Main Office  
Lethbridge Main Office

780-735-1800  
403-943-2295  
403-388-6689

Grande Prairie Main Office  
Red Deer Main Office  
[www.albertahealthservices.ca/eph.asp](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/eph.asp)

780-513-7517  
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