



Food Safety Standards for Australia

(Updated June 2004)

Note: *The Food Safety Standards do not apply in New Zealand. The food standards treaty between Australia and New Zealand does not include food hygiene standards.*

There are four food safety standards contained in Chapter 3 of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. These standards require businesses to follow food safety practices and use food premises and food transport vehicles that meet specified requirements.

Why were the Food Safety Standards developed?

The Food Safety Standards were developed:

- to provide more effective food safety regulations and reduce the level of food-borne illness in Australia;
- to provide nationally uniform food safety standards for Australia so businesses operating in more than one State or Territory have only one set of requirements;
- to replace existing food hygiene regulations that were sometimes significantly out-of-date; and
- to introduce less prescriptive regulations, that are simpler to comply with and give businesses more flexibility to determine the best way for them to comply with the requirements - providing food safety is not compromised.

What are the four food safety standards?

Standard 3.1.1 Interpretation and Application

Standard 3.1.1 is an introductory standard, which explains the main terms used within the Food Safety Standards, such as the meaning of 'safe and suitable food'. It also applies the other three standards to food businesses in Australia with some exceptions, which are mentioned later in this fact sheet.

Note: If you are unsure about whether any of the standards apply to your food business, contact your State or Territory health department.

Standard 3.2.1 Food Safety Programs

This standard does not currently apply to any food businesses. Victoria, however, applies a similar requirement under its Food Act to food businesses in that State. The table below describes the Victorian system and the situation in other States and Territories.

While Standard 3.2.1 is not compulsory for food businesses, in December 2003, Ministers agreed that food safety programs would be required from some types of food business. These are businesses that serve 'riskier' types of food, serve people that might be more susceptible to illness than the general population or carry out 'riskier' food operations in their business.

In summary, these food businesses are:

- food service in which potentially hazardous food is served to vulnerable populations (eg hospitals and nursing homes);
- producing, harvesting, processing and distributing raw oysters and other bivalves;
- catering operations serving food to the general population; and
- producers of manufactured and fermented meat.

The fact sheet Standard 3.2.1 *Food Safety Programs* provides more information.

Standard 3.2.2 Food Safety Practices and General Requirements

This standard sets out specific food handling controls related to the receipt, storage, processing, display, packaging, transportation, disposal and recall of food. Other requirements relate to the skills and knowledge of food handlers and their supervisors, the health and hygiene of food handlers, and the cleaning, sanitising, and maintenance of the food premises and equipment within the premises. If complied with, these requirements should ensure that food does not become unsafe or unsuitable. The fact sheet Food Safety Standard 3.2.2 *Food Safety Practices and General Requirements* provides more information.

Standard 3.2.3 Food Premises and Equipment

This standard sets out the requirements for food premises, fixtures, fittings, equipment and food transport vehicles. If food businesses comply with these requirements, they will find it easier to meet the food safety requirements of Standard 3.2.2. The fact sheet Food Safety Standard 3.2.3 *Food Premises and Equipment* provides more information.

When do food businesses need to comply with the standards?

Three of the standards (3.1.1, 3.2.2 and 3.2.3) apply from 24 February 2001 and come fully into force as each State and Territory makes the changes needed to enact the standards under their own laws and regulations. The following table indicates the proposed implementation dates in each State and Territory (current as of February 2004)

State/Territory	Implementation dates Standards 3.1.1, 3.2.2 and 3.2.3	Implementation of Food Safety Program requirement (Standard 3.2.1)
NSW	Commenced 16 May 2001	Prior to proclamation of the Food Act 2003, NSW proposes to prepare drafting instructions for a regulation to initiate a priority classification system of food businesses and commencement dates for mandatory food safety programs
Victoria	Commenced 1 January 2002.	All food businesses with the exception of retailers of low risk pre-packaged food are required to have a food safety program by 1 January 2003. Under a two class system, class 1 businesses (hospitals, aged care, child care) are required to have an independently developed and audited food safety program and class 2 businesses (others than class 1) have a choice of systems
Queensland	Commenced 1 July 2001.	Notification and skills and knowledge requirements came into effect in 1 July 2002. It is expected that proposals for the new Food Act will be considered by Cabinet by mid 2004. Proposals for food safety program requirements in the Act will reflect Ministerial Policy Guidelines on food safety programs and Food Safety Standard 3.2.1
Western Australia	The Standards will become fully enforceable upon passage of the new Public Health (Food and Related Matters) Bill, expected early in 2004.	.WA supports a phased approach to implementation of food safety programs and will be consulting with stakeholders prior to introduction of such a requirement.
South Australia	Fully implemented	SA supports the Ministerial Council decision to request FSANZ to consult on an amendment to Standard 3.2.1 to mandate food safety programs for nominated high risk businesses
Tasmania	Commenced 24 September 2001.	Tasmania is awaiting the outcome of national consideration to determine priority and timelines. Tasmania continues to encourage food safety programs on a voluntary basis.
ACT	Commenced 11 March 2002	Refer to the Australia New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council's decision of 12 December 2003. The ACT is preparing for the introduction of mandatory food safety programs for certain types of food businesses.
Northern Territory	Food Bill 2003 was passed by the Legislative Assembly on 19 February 2004 and will commence on 1 July 2004	The NT is awaiting outcome of the FSANZ standards development process following the endorsement of the Ministerial Council's policy guidelines for the management of food safety in Australia.

Note: FSANZ will consult nationally on the application of Standard 3.2.1 to specified businesses as part of the standard development process.

Who do the standards apply to?

The three compulsory food safety standards (3.1.1, 3.2.2 and 3.2.3) apply to every business involved in the handling of food for sale, or the sale of food in Australia, with the exception of businesses involved solely in primary production provided they do not process their products or sell them directly to the public. Also, there are exemptions from some of the provisions in the standards for charities and community groups and also for temporary premises and home-based food businesses.

As indicated earlier, Standard 3.2.1 is not mandatory. However, four industry sectors have been identified to which mandatory food safety programs should apply.

How will the standards affect businesses?

Standards 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 are based on the old food laws. Although there are some new requirements, businesses operating safely now and in accordance with the old food regulations should find that compliance with the new requirements is a simple exercise. However, there are some requirements that are **completely new** for all food businesses. Some examples of these requirements are:

- (from February 2002) ensuring that food handlers and supervisors have the skills and knowledge necessary for them to carry out their jobs safely;
- (from February 2002) supplying details about the business to the local enforcement agency unless this information is provided already under an existing food business registration system;
- taking steps to ensure that food received into the premises is safe and suitable; and
- if handling potentially hazardous food, having a thermometer accurate to +/- 1°C to measure the temperature of this food.

Some of the other provisions in the standards may also be new for food businesses in some States and Territories. This will depend on what was included in the old State and Territory hygiene regulations. State and Territory health departments will be able to provide advice on these local changes.

Standard 3.2.1 is a new requirement for the four business sectors listed previously. However, many businesses included in the sectors will already have food safety programs in place and may have to make only limited changes when the standard becomes compulsory. Assistance will be provided for food businesses in the sectors that do not currently have food safety programs that meet the requirements.

The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing is developing resources to help industry implement food safety programs and meet the national food safety standards. The Department is funding a wide range of projects to assist businesses improve their management of food safety. A large part of this involves the development of 'tools' to assist commercial food service establishments, children's services, small/medium hospitals, nursing homes and the seafood sector, to implement their own food safety programs with minimum cost and time.

Tools are resources such as templates, models, software and printed materials which can be used by food businesses to create their own workable food safety programs that are specific to their businesses. All tools should be completed in the first half of 2004.

Also, a food safety program tool will be developed to assist organisations that deliver ready to eat meals to housebound or other people who need assistance in this way. It is expected to be available by March 2005.

Need more information?

Copies of the standards, the guides to these and other fact sheets and supporting material can be found on the FSANZ website (<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/>). Food businesses may also seek advice directly from the Environmental Health Officers at their local council, or from their State or Territory health or health services department and Public Health Units. Information on assistance to industry can also be accessed through the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing www.health.gov.au

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