Food Safety Guidance for Forest School Leaders

In the UK, any entity that sells, cooks, stores, handles, prepares, or distributes food may be considered a 'food business' and is typically required to register with their local authority. This includes various types of operations, such as those from physical premises, home-based setups, mobile units, temporary premises, or online platforms.

Some charity or community events may be exempt from registration if the food activity is very limited and irregular. However, all food provided must be safe to eat, regardless of the frequency or scale of provision. Forest School leaders must follow food safety and hygiene best practices to protect participants.

Do I need to register my Forest School provision as a Food Business?

Many Forest School sessions involve cooking, storing, handling, preparing, and/or distributing food. Examples include:

- Offering a mid-session snack such as crumpets, toast, or hot drinks
- Working with participants to prepare food over a fire
- Cooking a meal yourself to share with participants

If these activities occur regularly (e.g. once a fortnight across the academic year), you will likely need to contact the Environmental Health Department at your Local Authority. Specific requirements vary between Local Authorities, but they may ask you to complete an online food business registration. This registration provides information about your food-related activities and allows them to determine the next steps.

Depending on their assessment, the Local Authority may:

- Allow you to proceed with no further action
- Contact you asking for further information
- Arrange a visit to your Forest School session to assess food safety practices

Your Local Authority can also offer advice on maintaining food safety standards. Failing to register when required may result in enforcement action.

Food Safety Responsibilities for Forest School Leaders

Whether or not your setting is formally registered as a food business, you have a legal duty to ensure that all food is prepared, stored, and served safely.

© 2019 Forest School Association

Guidance Note: Food Safety (V2 April 2025)

A Level 2 Food Safety qualification is a useful way to develop safe practices. Some Forest School leaders may have taken this training in other roles. However, generic courses assume access to facilities like hot running water, fridges, and tiled floors, which are often unavailable in an outdoor setting.

Instead, you might consider completing a Level 2 Outdoor Food Safety Course, which is tailored to outdoor environments and covers ways of working safely in this environment. A three-yearly requalification alongside a robust risk assessment will help maintain good practice.

As you develop your food risk assessment and working practises you may wish to consider the following key questions:

- How do you maintain good hand hygiene?
- How do you prevent physical contamination of foods (e.g. leaves and insects)
- Are all those involved in food preparation appropriately trained?
- How do you store ambient foods safely?
- How do you monitor and record expiry dates?
- Where do you store perishable foods, and how do you monitor/record their temperature?
- How do you keep raw and cooked foods separate to avoid cross-contamination?
- How do you ensure that high-risk foods (e.g., meat, dairy) are safe to serve?
- Do you have separate utensils for high-risk foods?
- How do you manage allergens and cross-contamination?
- Where and how do you wash and sanitise dishes after cooking/eating?
- Where do you record your food risk assessments?

Key UK Food Safety Laws

- **Food Safety Act 1990** – The main UK law on food safety. It makes it illegal to sell unsafe food, mislead consumers, or provide food that is not as described.
- **Food Hygiene Regulations 2013** – Sets hygiene standards for food handling, preparation, and storage.
- **General Food Regulations 2004** – Implements key EU food safety principles, including traceability and withdrawal of unsafe food.

© 2019 Forest School Association

- **Regulation (EC) 852/2004** – Requires food businesses to follow hygiene rules and apply a food safety management system based on HACCP principles (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points).

Further Guidance

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) provides comprehensive food safety guidance for small food providers and community settings:
https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/food-hygiene-for-your-business

Breaches of food safety and hygiene regulations can result in serious consequences, including:

i. Harm to participants
ii. Legal action against Forest School leaders or organisations

Under The General Food Regulations, individuals found guilty of food hygiene breaches may face an unlimited fine and/or up to six months' imprisonment. There have been cases where outdoor settings for children have faced enforcement action due to unsafe food handling or failure to register as a food business.

By following the guidance in this document, Forest School leaders can ensure that food provision remains safe, legally compliant, and enjoyable for all participants.

Prepared by Nell Seal with assistance from AI tools – April 2025

© 2019 Forest School Association