



Assisted Living Facilities (ALF) staff provide support and services to individuals with a wide range of needs—from those who require daily assistance with personal care to those who need minimal assistance. Caregivers, family members, ALF staff, and residents all want to avoid foodborne illness. The consequences, especially for the older adult, can be very serious and may even lead to death.

These questions can help you evaluate foodservice operations in ALF, elder group homes, and adult daycare facilities.



## Food Safety Considerations When Choosing Assisted Living Facilities

### How vulnerable are older adults to foodborne illnesses?

Unfortunately, older adults tend to be more vulnerable to foodborne illness for several reasons:

- Their immune systems may not function at full effectiveness.
- They tend to take daily medications that can inhibit immune systems.
- Their health may be compromised by a chronic disease.
- Their declining smell and taste sensors may not alert them to spoiled foods.

### What is the best way to check a facility's foodservice operation?

Meals are an important part of the daily schedule for residents. When touring a prospective ALF, ask to see the food preparation area, dining room, and the dishroom. Your unscheduled visit will allow you to observe general cleanliness.

The checklist on the next page suggests additional questions.

### Is the foodservice operation inspected?

State regulations classify ALFs as foodservice establishments. They should be inspected at least

once a year, the same as other commercial food operations. Inspection reports should be posted at the facility; they also are available online at <http://dia.iowa.gov/food> (Click on “Find an Inspection Report” and select “License Type of Foodservice Establishment.”)

Critical violations—such as temperature abuse or poor personal hygiene—should be noted because these are leading causes of foodborne illness.

### What are the qualifications of the foodservice manager?

Iowa state law requires that the person in charge demonstrates knowledge of safe food handling practices. This can occur with a demonstration during an inspection by the designated regulatory agency (Department of Inspection and Appeals or local health agency), or by certification through an approved agency.

Certification in food safety and sanitation can be earned from approved providers, such as the Dietary Managers Association, the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation ServSafe® Program, or through the 90 Hour Food Service Supervisor Sanitation course offered at Iowa community colleges.

## Foodservice questions to ask when visiting an Assisted Living Facility

### ...about procedures and personnel:

1. When was the last inspection?  
*(These should occur annually.)*
2. What did the inspector report?  
*(Critical violations are of greatest concern.)*
3. If critical violations were noted, how have they been corrected?
4. Is the foodservice manager certified in food safety?
5. How many staff members are typically on duty each meal period?  
*(There should be sufficient number of staff members to prepare and serve meals without risk of cross contamination.)*
6. How long have most foodservice staff members been at this ALF?
7. How many full-time staff members work only in foodservice?
8. Do foodservice staff members also assist older adults with personal care, such as escorting to the toilet?  
*(Proper handwashing before starting foodservice tasks is very important.)*
9. Are background checks run before hiring new staff members?
10. Are all staff members required to have physical health check-ups?

11. Do written policies specify when foodservice staff members should not work due to health or illnesses?  
*(This prevents infected employees without symptoms from harming food.)*

12. Do staff members have sick leave?

### ...about food preparation:

1. Is access to the food production area limited to foodservice staff or escorted visitors?  
*(Intentional contamination of food products by an outside group is a concern.)*
2. Do all visitors in the kitchen wear hair restraints?  
*(No one likes hair in his/her food.)*
3. Is the back door kept closed?  
*(This limits pest infestation and unauthorized access.)*
4. Are counters free from clutter of food packages and personal belongings?  
*(This can contribute to cross contamination.)*
5. Are refrigerated or frozen foods left at room temperature?  
*(Improper thawing is another leading cause of foodborne illness.)*
6. Are temperature gauges present on the exterior and interior of refrigeration and freezer storage units?  
*(Two gauges allow for verification of accuracy.)*

7. Is a log kept that shows temperatures are not above 40°F (in refrigerators) or 0°F (for freezers)?  
*(Temperature abuse of foods allows bacteria to grow to harmful levels.)*

8. Are food staff members washing their hands properly (10 to 15 seconds with soap and warm water) after handling raw food, taking out garbage, before putting on clean gloves, and after returning from break?  
*(Foods and surfaces they touch can become contaminated from unclean hands.)*

9. Are gloves worn to handle food that is ready to eat?  
*(This is important because bacteria won't be killed by cooking.)*

10. Are gloves changed after the task is completed?  
*(For example, portioning food and opening the refrigerator door are two different tasks; it is possible to contaminate the glove.)*

11. Is a hand sink available and stocked with soap and disposable towels?

12. Are all staff members in the kitchen wearing clean uniforms and aprons and have their hair restrained?  
*(Soiled clothing can contaminate foods and surfaces.)*

13. Are aprons removed when staff members leave the kitchen to take out the garbage or use the restroom?

### ...about the dining room:

1. Are tables free of crumbs and other food debris?

2. Are chairs and floor free of food debris?

*(This can indicate attention to cleaning.)*

3. Are tables cleaned using a bucket of detergent water and clean wiping cloths?

*(Surfaces need to be clean prior to sanitizing.)*

4. Is a sanitizing spray or solution used after surfaces are cleaned?

*(Cleaning and sanitizing of all surfaces that may come in contact with food is required. Sanitizing helps reduce bacterial levels.)*

5. Are tables and chairs in good repair?

*(Sturdy chairs may be needed to provide adequate support.)*

6. Do servers wear clean uniforms and hair restraints?

7. Did servers wash their hands before setting tables or touching plates of food?

8. Do servers avoid touching the rim of glassware or eating end of silverware?

*(This avoids contamination from unclean hands.)*

9. Are cold foods and beverages served just prior to meal service?

*(Pre-setting of salads and milk is common but cold foods should not be held above 40°F for very long because quality is decreased and bacteria may grow. A refrigerator unit or placement on ice is preferred).*

10. Are hot foods kept hot (above 135°F)?

### ...about dishroom cleaning:

1. Is there a dishwashing machine in the kitchen area?

2. How do staff members ensure water is hot enough or the correct chemical concentration is used?

*(Test strips should be used each meal period and results recorded to verify that readings on gauges are accurate or chemical solutions are at correct concentrations to sanitize dishware.)*

3. Does one staff member load the machine with soiled dishware and another staff member unload clean items?

*(If not, there is risk of cross contaminating clean dishware.)*

4. Is there a handwashing sink with soap and disposable towels in the dishroom area?



## Food safety reminders for those living on their own —Food safety is at the heart of good health

- Wash hands frequently during the day.

This is especially important before taking medications and eating, and after touching pets and using the bathroom.

*Never fear, the germs stop here.*

- Clean out the refrigerator regularly.

Discard prepared foods older than three days. It's a good idea to label and date all foods.

*If in doubt, throw it out.*

- Check the temperature in the refrigerator.

It should be between 32°F and 40°F. Consider a gift of an easy-to-read storage thermometer to help monitor (available at discount stores for less than \$10). *Keep cold foods cold.*

- Keep kitchen work surfaces clean.

*Clutter can contribute to cross contamination.*

- Keep raw and cooked foods separated.

*Cross out cross contamination.*



- Choose foods carefully.

Avoid raw (unpasteurized) dairy products or undercooked meats and poultry. Heat deli luncheon meats prior to eating.

*Heat then eat.*

## For more information

### ... about food safety:

- **Answer Line**—  
www.extension.iastate.edu/answerline  
OR  
1-800-262-3804  
(Iowa Relay, TTY:  
1-800-735-2942)
- **Iowa Department of Inspection and Appeals**—  
www.dia.iowa.gov/food
- **Iowa Food Safety Task Force**—  
www.profoodsafety.org
- **Iowa State University Extension Distribution Center**—  
www.extension.iastate.edu/store  
(Click “Food, Nutrition and Health” in topic list on left; then on “Food and Nutrition - Food Safety”)
- **Iowa State University Food Safety Project**—  
www.iowafoodsafety.org
- **Partnership for Food Safety Education**—  
www.fightbac.org
- **Your local Iowa State University Extension office**—  
(To find the nearest office, go to [www.extension.iastate.edu/ouroffices.htm](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/ouroffices.htm))

### ... about other resources for older adults:

- **Iowa Department of Elder Affairs**—  
www.state.ia.us/elderaffairs/  
515-725-3383
- **Family Caregiver**—  
www.iowafamilycaregiver.org/index.asp
- **Iowa Life Long Links**—  
www.lifelonglinks.org
- **Iowa State University Extension Distribution Center**—  
www.extension.iastate.edu/store  
(Click “Home and Family” in topic list on left; then on “Older Adults”)

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### ... about how to express your concerns:

- **Iowa Department of Elder Affairs Ombudsman**—  
1-800-532-3213  
or 515-725-3383
- **Iowa Department of Inspection and Appeals**—  
877-686-0027
- **Iowa Department of Public Health**—  
1-800-362-2736



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