

First Friday FAQs

Several weeks ago, members of the health department's food protection team visited downtown businesses to talk food safety, events like First Friday, and permitting. We enjoyed talking with everyone and appreciated the questions we received. We realized after reaching out that there may be some lingering concerns, so we put together this FAQ document hoping it may be helpful to vendors at downtown events.



Q: When do I have to get a permit to serve food or beverage?

A: You have to get a temporary food service (TFS) permit whenever you offer to the public open foods or beverages or what we call TCS foods, which are consumables that must be kept cold or hot for safety.

That doesn't mean that you have to prewrap the foods you serve or that you can never serve cider at First Friday. What it does mean is that you can hand out commercially prepackaged items like bottles of water, cans of your favorite brew, wrapped candy, and the like without a permit, but if you want to pour wine, have a veggie tray, or provide similar service, you need to talk with us about permitting.

Q: Why do I have to get a permit for open foods and TCS items?

A: Simple— risk. When you hand out a can of soda, you aren't increasing the risk of the product. However, the moment something is opened, the potential for viruses and bacteria transferred by contaminated surfaces or hands is in play. TCS foods are an even bigger concern. If they are not heated or held at the right temperatures, bacteria can grow and make people sick. A warm beer may not be as tasty but room temperature salmon spread is more than just little fishy. A permit gives us the ability to talk with you how to serve these items safely—and make sure that the people serving food at the events that you attend do the same.

Q: Why are you requiring downtown businesses to permit? We're just giving it away.

A: Well, three reasons: fairness, it's good public health, and—it's the law. Yes, the law requires that entities serving food, regardless of charge, to license or permit with few exceptions. Second, other businesses around Missoula who serve food, many of them your neighbors and fellow MDA members, have to permit or license to do so; it's only fair that you do too. Lastly, as mentioned above, permitting supports practices that help serve safe food. The last thing that you need is an outbreak that puts a damper on the events that make Missoula festive.

Q: Do I have to get a commercial kitchen?

A: If you are getting your items already prepared from a commercial source and are using all disposable dishes, probably not. However, if you want to make your stellar chili to share, you will need to get a commercial kitchen space and follow the all pertinent food rules.

Q: If I get a permit, how long is it good for?

A: Permits are good for one event per calendar year. However, if the same event happens over and over again, like First Friday, you don't have to get a new permit for each one, just one permit per year. That means you can have all of the 2018 First Fridays on one permit, but if you want to serve at other events like Ladies' Night, you will need another permit. If you know that you are going to participate in more than one event, you can apply for all of them at once and save money on the review fees.

Q: If I have questions, how can I get in touch with someone at the health department?

A: Easy! We have someone available every weekday from 8 am to 5 pm with the exception of the noon hour. You can give us a call at 258-4755, email us at envhealth@missoulacounty.us, or stop on by.

