

## EH and IC Food Safety Program Updates

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**To:** Chair and Members of the Board of Health

**Meeting Date:** June 4, 2025

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## Recommendations

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It is recommended that the Board of Health receive this report for information.

## Key Points

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- Wellington-Dufferin Guelph (WDG) Public Health has a total of 270 fixed high-risk food premises that are inspected three times per year, 801 moderate-risk food premises that are inspected two times per year and 675 low-risk food premises that are inspected once per year, for a total of 1,746 fixed food premises.
- WDG Public Health completed 100% of required food premises inspections in 2024 and in Q1 2025, achieving a 100% inspection completion rate despite a 15.6% increase in inspection volume since 2022. Complaint inspections rose fivefold over the same period, reflecting both increased public engagement and improved accessibility of reporting mechanisms.
- WDG Public Health responded to 150 special event approval requests in 2024. 21 special events received an on-site inspection, with a total of 352 vendor inspections at those events. The remaining 129 special events were assessed remotely, with several hundred additional vendors being assessed and approved to sell food on-site. The number of special events held in WDG has continued to grow.

- Food safety infractions observed during food inspections have remained stable, and the majority are corrected during the inspection, demonstrating effective on-site education and compliance support.
- WDG Public Health launched no-charge food handler certification exams in 2025, increasing access for young people, newcomers, and low-income residents.
- Public Health Inspectors initiated 243 allergen education conversations in 2025 as part of a national pilot to improve food allergy awareness in food service environments.
- Implementation of improvements to WDG Public Health's mass catering inspection program, including enhanced operator training and resources stemming from the 2023 International Women's Day outbreak, and a comprehensive internal process review and global benchmarking study is underway.

## Background

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The purpose of this report is to provide an update on WDG Public Health's Food Safety Program, including key performance and outcome metrics, community outreach efforts and accomplishments in 2024 and 2025 Q1.

WDG Public Health's food safety program aims to protect public health through various activities such as food premises inspection, education and enforcement actions; public education; and responding to complaints, suspected enteric outbreaks and emergencies.

WDG Public Health has a total of 270 fixed high-risk food premises that are inspected three times per year, 801 moderate-risk food premises that are inspected two times per year and 675 low-risk food premises that are inspected once per year, for a total of 1,746 fixed food premises requiring inspections. Each food premises undergoes an annual (at a minimum) risk assessment that establishes its risk rating based on a variety of risk-based intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

This report is divided into two parts:

- (1) Key food safety program statistics; and
- (2) Key food safety program initiatives.

The food safety program statistics presented in this report form much of the basis of a balanced scorecard that provides a sense of 'food safety levels' in our community. This report has a primary focus on lagging indicators but also contains leading indicators such as food handler certification training. At a minimum (but not limited to), the statistics are required to be reported as per the [Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Food Safety Protocol, 2019](#) with several used as internal indicators of success by our inspection team. Moreover, these and other program data are used to drive service excellence and continuous improvement.

The following food safety program statistics are included in this report:

- Food Premises Inspection Results
- Special Event Inspections
- Food Safety Demand Work (Requests for Service or Information and Complaints)
- Food Safety Complaints
- Food Safety Related Enforcement Action
- Food Safety Inspection Findings
- Food Handler Certification Training

The second part of this report represents 2024 and 2025 food safety program initiatives that underscore the agency's innovation and focus on continuous improvement and community health.

Updates are provided for the following food safety program initiatives:

- Allergen Awareness Pilot Project
- Mass Catering Report implementation
- New Free food handler examinations and other no-charge community-based food safety training delivery
- Novel and High-Risk Food Processes
- Reusable container amendment to Single-Use Items Bylaw in Guelph

## Discussion

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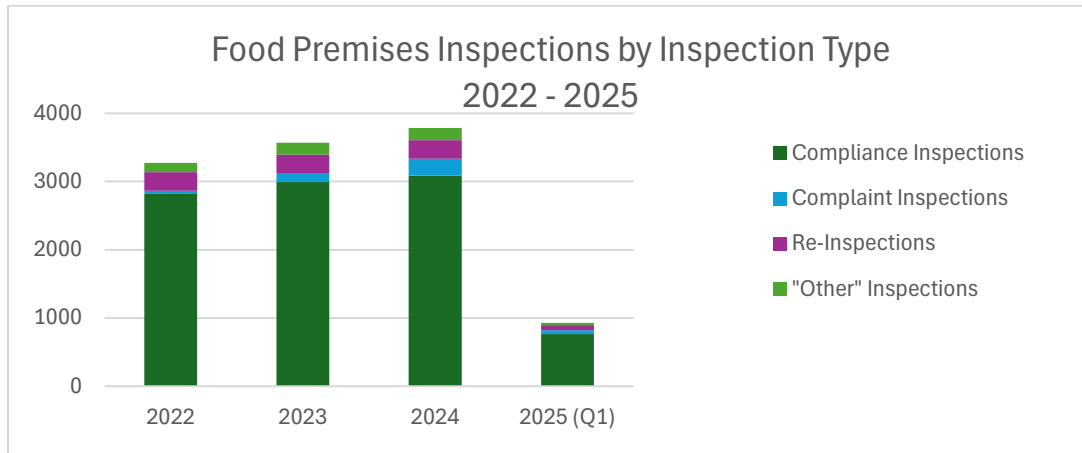
### Food Safety Program Statistics

#### Food Premises Inspection Results

##### Food Premises Inspections by Inspection Type

WDG Public Health conducts routine inspections of all food premises based on an inspection frequency determined by risk. Additional inspections are conducted as needed and include re-inspections, complaint inspections and pre-opening inspections.

The total number of inspections conducted has increased steadily over time as the population has grown. The growth from 2022 to 2024 alone represents a 15.6% increase in inspection count (510 inspections). Compliance inspections, complaint inspections and re-inspections all increased, with complaint inspections representing the most significant increase (a 5-fold increase (201 inspections)) (Figures 1a and 1b, Table 1). Through effort and innovation, WDG Public Health Public Health Inspectors continue to meet the challenge of higher inspection numbers, achieving a 100% completion rate.

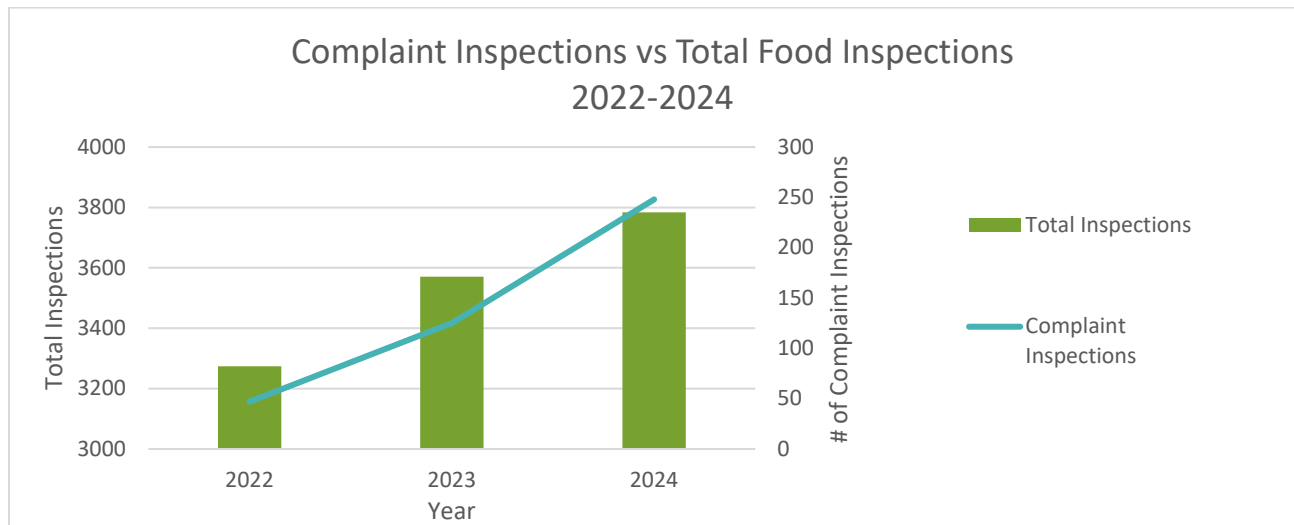


**Figure 1a:** Number of Food Premises Inspections and Investigations 2022-2025 Q1. Data extracted from the Environmental Health Department inspection database

Year	Facilities Inspected	Total Inspections	Compliance Inspections	Complaint Inspections	Re-Inspections	"Other" Inspections *
2022	1710	3274	2818	47	274	135
2023	1789	3571	2992	125	281	173
2024	1834	3784	3086	248	273	177
2025 (Q1)	779	930	765	57	75	33

\* Other Inspections include pre-opening inspections and inspections that could not be completed.

**Table 1:** Total and Inspection and Investigation Numbers 2022-2025 Q1 extracted from the Environmental Health Department inspections database



**Figure 2b:** Number of Complaint Inspections vs Total Food Premises Inspections 2022-2024. Data extracted from the Environmental Health Department inspection database

A re-inspection is required when infractions (in particular, critical infractions) are identified during an inspection. The re-inspection rate is used as an overall measure of compliance among food premises.

Re-inspection numbers have remained relatively unchanged year to year, with 8-10% of inspections leading to a re-inspection, but we anticipate seeing a higher re-inspection rate in 2025 as we recently formalized a process for 'remote' ('virtual') re-inspections under some circumstances. Remote inspections allow the inspector to observe the correction through a live video stream, photos, document review or other remote means.

### Food Premises Inspections by Risk

Each food premises in WDG undergoes an annual (at a minimum) risk assessment that establishes its risk rating based on various factors. Some of these factors include the establishment's compliance history, complexity of operations, population served, types of foods served and implementation of food safety management systems. Food premises are categorized as either low, moderate or high-risk. A high-risk facility is not necessarily an unsafe one. Rather, due to the various factors (as indicated earlier) it warrants more inspections and oversight.

Figure 2 below demonstrates how WDG Public Health has experienced an increase in the number of inspections at all facility risk levels. The smallest increase has been with high-risk operations, and the largest increase has been with moderate-risk operations.



**Figure 2:** High, Moderate and Low Risk Food inspections WDG Public Health 2022-2024

## Special Event Inspections

Special events represent a growing inspection burden on WDG Public Health, but one that is important, as special events represent a challenging food handling environment and heightened risk.

WDG Public Health responded to 150 special event approval requests in 2024. Based on the results of a risk assessment, 21 special events required on-site inspections, with a total of 352 vendor inspections at those events. Special events requiring on-site inspections are referred to as *Class A Special Events* and typically occur annually. The remaining 129 special events were assessed remotely (*Class B*), with several hundred additional vendors being assessed and approved to sell food on-site. Refer to *Figure 3 Number of Special Events in WDG*

Special event inspection results generally show a high degree of food safety compliance. Much of that compliance stems from the preparation work and education for these vendors conducted by Public Health Inspectors prior to onsite inspections. The infractions identified and corrected during the inspections represent the impact that these field inspections have on protecting community health.



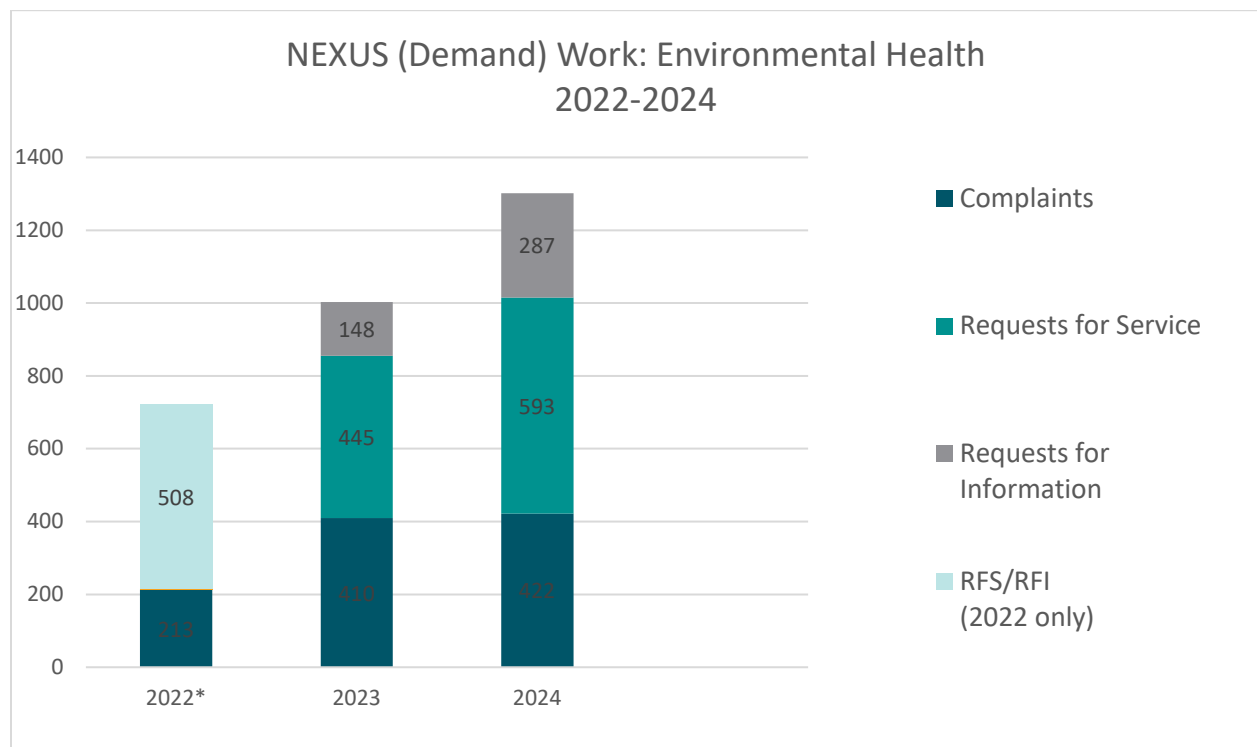
**Figure 3:** Number of Special Events in WDG 2018-2024. Data extracted from the Environmental Health Department inspection database

## Food Safety Demand Work (Requests for Service or Information and Complaints)

### Food Safety Demand Work (Nexus)

Figure 4 NEXUS (Demand) Work: Environmental Health 2022-2024, represents the total number of food safety-related Nexus per year. A Nexus can represent a complaint (such as a complaint about unsanitary restaurant conditions), an inquiry (such as a food safety question from the public) or a request for service (such as a request from a restaurant operator for an opening inspection). Nexus rates are a measure of unplanned or ‘demand’ work that Public Health Inspectors must respond to within 24 hours. This work may be straightforward and quick, such as answering a question about the cooking temperature of chicken or it may be complex and time-consuming, such as investigating a suspected outbreak at a food premises.

Demand work has increased significantly since the pandemic and has surpassed pre-pandemic levels, where the total number of Nexus were 462 and 580 in 2019 and 2020 respectively. 2024 saw a total of 1,302 food safety-related complaints, inquiries and requests for service. This increase reflects population and economic growth in WDG but also represents an increase in food-related complaints or inquiries from the public, helped in part by WDG Public Health’s communication efforts and helped by improvements to complaint reporting mechanisms.



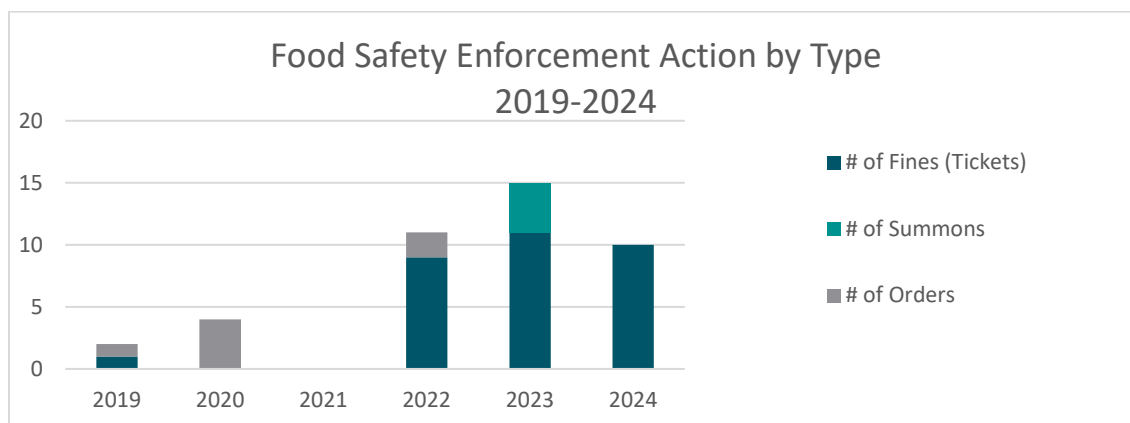
**Figure 4:** NEXUS (Demand) Work: Environmental Health 2022-2024. Data extracted from the Environmental Health Department inspection database

	2022*	2023	2024
Complaints	213	410	422
Requests for Service	0	445	593
Requests for Information	0	148	287
RFS/RFI (2022 only)	508		
<b>Total</b>	<b>721</b>	<b>1003</b>	<b>1302</b>
* 2022 non-complaints were captured under a combined 'request-for-service / request-for-information category'			

**Table 2:** NEXUS (Demand) Work: Environmental Health 2022-2024. Extracted from the Environmental Health Department inspections database

## Food Safety Related Enforcement Action

Public Health Inspectors successfully deploy an education-first approach to securing compliance with food premises operators. Where education or other supportive approaches fail to achieve compliance, Public Health Inspectors use progressive enforcement. Public Health Inspectors have received enforcement training (in some cases, refresher training) over the past three years. Additional supports and mechanisms have been implemented to streamline and facilitate the agency's enforcement process. These efforts have contributed to an increase in fines (tickets) being issued by WDG Public Health and, as a result, have served to more efficiently and effectively improve compliance among the small number of operators who needed additional encouragement to comply. Refer to Figure 5 Food Safety Enforcement Action by Type 2019-2024. When required to immediately address a health hazard, Public Health Inspectors issue an order under section 13 of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*, regardless of what other enforcement actions are being taken.



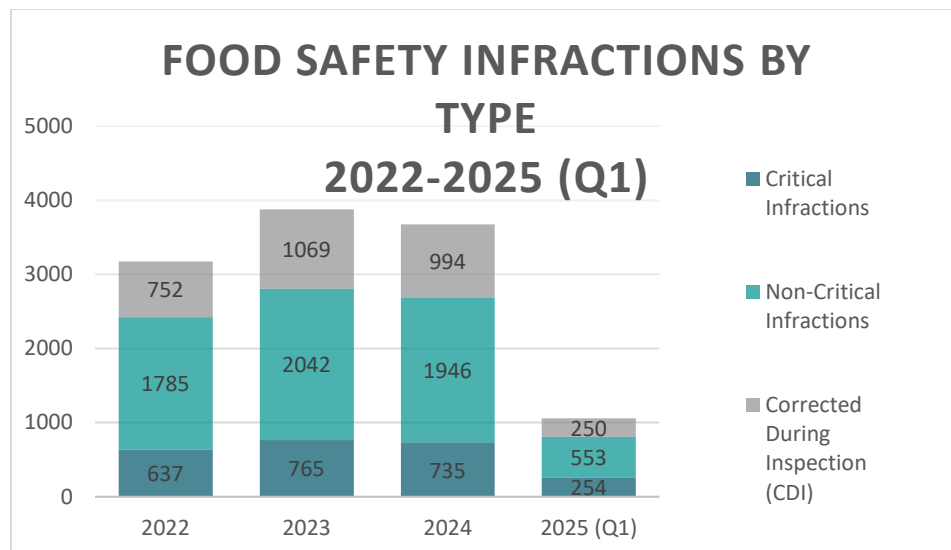
**Figure 5:** Food Safety Enforcement Action by Type 2019-2024. Data extracted from the Environmental Health Department inspection database



## Food Safety Inspection Findings

Public Health Inspectors typically observe infractions during inspections of food premises. These are documented and addressed with the operator. When infractions can be fully corrected during the inspection, they are designated as CDI (Corrected During Inspection). Infractions are also designated as either critical (i.e., greater food safety impact such as food temperatures or hand washing) or non-critical (i.e., less food safety impact such as non-food contact surface cleanliness). Figure 6, Food Safety Infractions by Type 2022-2025 (Q1), shows how the number of infractions has remained relatively stable over time.

Inspection results are disclosed on WDG Public Health's inspection disclosure site, [Check Before You Choose](#), allowing patrons to make informed dining or food purchase decisions.



**Figure 6:** Food Safety Infractions by Type 2022-2025 (Q1). Data extracted from the Environmental Health Department inspection database

## Food Handler Certification & Training

Ontario's Food Premises Regulation requires at least one certified food handler to be present at a food premises during operating hours. Food handlers can choose certification from among several training providers approved by the Ministry of Health or through public health units. Since 2023, 3,116 food handlers have been certified through WDG Public Health or our training partner, Conestoga College (Refer to Table 4: Key Food Handler Training Statistics). Most of these certifications were provided at **no charge** through a program WDG Public Health has operated with local public high schools for several years. This program has served to ensure employees enter the food workforce 'pre-trained' and to improve food safety literacy among high school students.

WDG Public Health encourages food premises operators to go beyond the minimum regulatory requirements for certified food handlers. Many operators do. More recently, WDG Public Health has been encouraging higher risk operations such as mass caterers to certify their supervisors and managers to a higher level of certification often referred to as manager-level certification.

<b>Key Food Handler Training Statistics</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025 (Q1)</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Courses Delivered (Zoom &amp; in-person)</b>				
Conestoga College	7	14	3	27
<b>Total Courses Delivered (2023-2025 Q1)</b>				<b>27</b>
<b>Exams Administered</b>				
WDG Public Health (in-person)	7	7	2	16
Conestoga College (Zoom & in-person)	18	11	2	31
<b>Total Exams Administered (2023-2025 Q1)</b>				<b>47</b>
<b>Food Handlers Certified</b>				
WDG Public Health (general)	90	113	23	226
WDG Public Health (no-charge high school student program)	939	810	441	2,190
Conestoga College (WDG Public Health logo'd)	367	274	59	700
<b>Total Food Handlers Certified (2023-2025 Q1)</b>				<b>3,116</b>

*Table 4: Key Food Handler Training Statistics. Data extracted from Conestoga College and WDG Public Health's Internal Database.*

## Major Initiatives

WDG Public Health has a history of food safety program initiatives that underscore the program's focus on and dedication to innovation and community health. These initiatives are often identified and driven by PHIs themselves and conducted in collaboration with other WDG Public Health teams or with external stakeholders. Updates on a selection of current initiatives are included below.

### Allergen Awareness Pilot

WDG Public Health is working with [Food Allergy Canada](#) and [Université Laval](#) in a research study designed to safeguard and improve the lives of **3 million Canadians** and their families who live with food allergies. The study examines the role of the Public Health Inspector as a mechanism to disseminate Food Allergy Canada's foodservice tools and resources, thereby improving allergy awareness with food business operators.

WDG Public Health PHIs are holding short allergen conversations with food service operators during the course of routine inspections and provide additional resources as warranted.

The program commenced in February 2025 and to date, PHIs have held 243 allergen conversations with operators and have directed them to the [Food Allergy Canada Food Services Operator Resources Page](#). WDG Public Health also participated in the review of the materials available on the resource page and contributed valuable feedback.

## **Mass Catering Report implementation**

Recent enteric outbreaks have highlighted the risks associated with large scale food production such as mass catering and central kitchen operations. Most notable were the 2023 outbreak in WDG during an International Women's Day Luncheon [Food Safety Program Report: International Women's Day Luncheon Event Enteric Outbreak](#) and the 2023 E. coli outbreak in licensed facility-based child care facilities in Calgary linked to a shared kitchen [Food safety and licensed facility-based child care review panel final report](#).

Following the 2023 International Women's Day Luncheon outbreak, WDG Public Health embarked on a systematic review of its inspection program related to mass caterers and central kitchens. WDG Public Health's Health Promotion Team led a global review of related risks and best practices among select public health agencies. Data collected from the Environmental Health Team's earlier systemic review and from other sources helped to inform the Health Promotion Team's work. The final report presented six recommendations that are currently being implemented. Some key recommendations were implemented immediately as related gaps had already been identified. For example, in late 2024, WDG Public Health launched a web page containing a series of editable food safety logs and guidance materials [Food Safety Guidance and Resources for Food Businesses](#) for operators. Other recommendations such as an increased focus on food safety culture, operator training and enhanced inspection strategies are well under way with planned implementation later in 2025 or 2026.

## **New Free food handler examinations and other no-charge community-based food safety training delivery**

To improve food safety practices within food premises and with the community in general, WDG Public Health increased accessibility by expanding its offerings of no-charge training and educational sessions by offering no-charge food handler certification examinations to those who reside in WDG. No-charge food handler certification exams commenced in 2025. Six exam sessions have been scheduled for 2025 (two in each primary WDG Public Health office). Additional office-based or on-site exam sessions will be considered based on demand.

## Novel and High-Risk Food Processes

WDG Public Health continued to respond to emerging food safety risks through the implementation of agency resources and policies that help ensure effective and consistent public health practice among WDG Public Health PHIs. These efforts also included external communication, education and inspection strategies for WDG food operators.

Specific risk areas addressed in 2024 included:

- **Robotic Vending Machines.** An approval risk assessment tool and guidance documents were created. WDG Public Health presented on the subject of robotic vending machine risk and mitigation strategies at two conferences. Following those conferences, WDG Public Health received invitations from Peel Region Public Health and Toronto Public Health to deliver the presentation to their respective inspection teams.
- **Shared Commercial Rental Kitchens.** The growing use of shared commercial kitchens can help to reduce food safety risk by providing new or small operators with properly designed and compliant operating kitchens. However, the presence of multiple and often incompatible processes and foods within the same operations setting can create significant risk such as microbial and allergen cross contamination. To help address this WDG Public Health conducted internal awareness building and education with its PHIs and developed a guide for operators of Shared Commercial Rental Kitchens ([Shared Commercial Kitchen Owner's Guide](#)).
- **Addressing High-Risk Food Production Processes.** Guidance documents were created for use by PHIs for the approval of high-risk food production processes such as Steak Tartare (finely chopped and flavoured raw beef) and Kitfo (minced and spiced raw beef). The guidance materials will help ensure a consistent risk assessment, education and documentation approach by PHIs and will help ensure consistent and science-based expectations for operators who prepare and serve these high-risk foods.

## Reusable container amendment to Single-Use Items Bylaw in Guelph

On March 25, 2025, Guelph approved changes to the Single Use Items Bylaw. Starting September 1, 2025, businesses in Guelph must accept customers' reusable containers for food orders, whether the food is eaten on-site or taken away. Alternatively, businesses can provide their own reusable containers instead.<sup>2</sup>

Recommendations for businesses were developed in consultation with WDG Public Health. The City of Guelph posted relevant WDG Public Health recommendations on its website <https://guelph.ca/wp-content/uploads/WDGPH-Recommendations-SUI.pdf> with a link to the WDG Public Health webpage developed to provide re-useable information and requirements to all operators within the health unit. <https://wdgpublichealth.ca/your-community/inspections-operators-businesses/food-safety-guidance-and-resources-food-businesses>

Work on this initiative revealed a growing use of re-useable take-out containers. The inappropriate use, handling or collection of these containers by the food service operator or the inadequate design, manufacture, sanitation or handling of these containers by the service provider could pose a food safety and compliance risk. WDG Public Health investigated the risk and has implemented internal protocols to address them.

## Health Equity Implications

WDG Public Health's Food safety program integrates a strong equity lens by addressing barriers faced by priority populations such as newcomers, low-income individuals, youth and small business operators.

The introduction of no-charge food handler certification exams and expanded community-based training improves access for individuals who may face financial or logistical obstacles. This supports youth entering the workforce and ensures a baseline of food safety knowledge across diverse communities.

WDG Public Health also supports small and emerging food businesses, including those using shared kitchens and conducting novel food operations, by providing tailored resources and guidance. These efforts help reduce compliance challenges that can disproportionately affect operators with limited capital or regulatory familiarity.

The increase in public complaints and inquiries (NEXUS) reflects growing community engagement. Accessible complaint mechanisms empower all residents to participate in food safety oversight, which is particularly valuable in underserved or higher-risk areas.

Initiatives like the Mass Catering Report implementation and Allergen Awareness Pilot enhance protection in high-risk settings, many of which serve vulnerable populations. Additionally, WDG Public Health's collaboration on reusable container policies ensures equity is considered in the design and rollout of new regulations, supporting both food safety and environmental goals.

## Conclusion

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WDG Public Health's food safety program continues to evolve to meet the needs of a growing and diverse community. The program's strong foundation in evidence-based inspection, enforcement and education has ensured consistently high levels of compliance and public protection, even as inspection volumes and demand work have increased. The program's ability to maintain a 100% inspection completion rate while integrating new approaches—such as virtual re-inspections and expanded outreach—demonstrates a commitment to operational excellence and responsiveness.

Beyond regulatory compliance, the Food safety program reflects WDG Public Health's broader commitment to innovation, equity, and community well-being. Through targeted initiatives like free certification exams, allergen awareness education, and support for high-risk and emerging food operations, WDG Public Health is working to reduce barriers, build food safety capacity and support inclusive economic growth. These efforts contribute not only to safer food environments but also to more equitable health outcomes across Wellington and Dufferin Counties and the City of Guelph.

## Ontario Public Health Standards

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### Foundational Standards

- ☐ Population Health Assessment
- ☐ Health Equity
- ☒ Effective Public Health Practice
- ☐ Emergency Management

### Program Standards

- ☐ Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being
- ☒ Food Safety
- ☐ Healthy Environments
- ☐ Healthy Growth and Development
- ☐ Immunization
- ☒ Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control
- ☐ Safe Water
- ☐ School Health
- ☐ Substance Use and Injury Prevention

## 2024-2028 WDGPH Strategic Goals

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More details about these strategic goals can be found in [WDGPH's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan](#).

- ☒ Improve health outcomes
- ☒ Focus on children's health
- ☒ Build strong partnerships
- ☒ Innovate our programs and services
- ☐ Lead the way toward a sustainable Public Health system

## References

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1. [Ontario. Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Ontario Public Health Standards, 2019.](#) [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2025 Jan 14]. Available from: [Food Safety Protocol, 2019 \(gov.on.ca\)](#)
2. <https://guelph.ca/2025/03/reusable-container-amendment-to-single-use-items-bylaw/>