

Questions To Ask When Choosing A Caterer

Is the caterer inspected by the local health unit?

- Request to view the most recent inspection report, as well as an inspection history. If the caterer is not willing to share inspection reports (this should be a red flag). You can also access inspection reports on the health unit website by going to the INSIGHT Inspection reports tab.
- Please note public health inspectors do not inspect private home kitchens, so if you choose a caterer operating out of their home, be aware that there is no oversight by any regulatory agency.

How does the caterer prepare the food?

- Does the catering company have certified food handlers?
- Does the catering company only use food from inspected sources? It is illegal to serve uninspected meat, ungraded eggs and unpasteurized milk (local or organic foods still need to meet food safety requirements).
- Do they have adequate refrigeration to hold raw and prepared foods?
- How do they keep food for service hot and cold? Potentially hazardous foods cannot be displayed at room temperature.
- Does the caterer serve the food, or is it set up as a self serve buffet table? There are risks with serving buffet style that can be minimized. (Check out the bulletin "Buffet Food Service Requirements for Caterers and Restaurants") available on our web site
- Are multiple sets of serving utensils available?
- Does the caterer operate using well water? If so, do they sample the water regularly?
- If they are to cook food at the event do they have a portable kitchen equipped with the following:
 - hand washing facilities (glove use and hand sanitizers are not a substitute for hand washing)
 - adequate equipment for refrigeration and hot holding (food should not be left at room temperature)
 - sufficient food grade containers to keep prepared and raw products separate
 - covered area where food is prepared

How will the food be transported?

- How will the caterer transport the meal? A separate clean vehicle is needed. The vehicle is considered a food premises and must comply with the Food Premises Regulation.

Other things to consider:

Is the caterer able to accommodate food allergies /sensitivities? What size of group can the caterer accommodate?

If you decide to hire a caterer who is uninspected and operates from their home, we strongly urge you to pay a visit to the home to ensure a suitable set up is available.

- Consider the following:
 - Does the caterer operate using well water? If so, do they sample the water regularly?
 - Do they have adequate refrigeration to hold raw and prepared foods prior to the event?
 - Do they have sufficient preparation space for the volume of food required?
 - Do they have an area suitable for washing hands located in the preparation area?
 - Is the home free of pests?
 - Pets not permitted in the food areas of the home?
 - Is a clean vehicle used for delivering food only?
 - Does the caterer have sufficient hot and cold holding units available to hold and serve food from?