



# THE STATE OF OUR PLATES

## The food hygiene lottery

Our analysis of tens of thousands of food hygiene inspections reveals the areas that tend to have the worst eateries, and the chains that have too many branches you'd want to avoid

**A**s many as 17 million people say they were affected by food poisoning in the last two years, which they believe was caused by eating out or takeaway food. But the likelihood of you falling ill can depend on where you live, or which chain you eat at.

We've uncovered wide variations in the quality of food hygiene between different places and high street chains. For example, if you're eating out in parts of Bexley in Greater London, you might want to check the scores on the Food Standards Agency website at [ratings.food.gov.uk](http://ratings.food.gov.uk) before you order. Residents

of the B35 postcode in Birmingham, however, can take comfort that the eateries inspected here are outperforming the rest of the country.

### HOW THEY ALL COMPARE

Outlets are inspected by environmental health officers using Food Standards Agency ratings. They are rated on a six point scale – zero being the worst and five the best, apart from in Scotland which has a different system. A score of three is 'generally satisfactory', though this still allows for some lapses. At the foot of the table, we found the DA7 postcode in

Bexley averaged a score of just 2.6 – almost half the premises inspected in this area had a score of two or less. By contrast, Birmingham B35 topped the table with a near-perfect 4.9.

Some of this variation will be due to the types of food outlets in the locality – hygiene ratings cover everything from hospitals to kebab shops. Overall, schools and universities tend to score best and sandwich and takeaway shops worst, although the assessment used is the same for all, and any food outlet should be able to achieve a good rating – as many takeaways do.

# The best and worst areas for hygiene scores

The tables show the UK postcodes with the best and worst average hygiene scores, and the percentage of outlets in an area that were rated lower than a 3. Sample size shown in brackets. There isn't data for all local authorities – those shown in the tables were the best and worst according to the available data.

BEST POSTCODES INSPECTED			
	Postcode	Scored lower than a 3	Average score
<b>BIRMINGHAM</b> (34)	B35	0%	<b>4.9</b>
<b>NORTH DEVON</b> (199)	EX31	1%	<b>4.9</b>
<b>EDEN</b> (85)	CA16	1%	<b>4.9</b>
<b>BRISTOL</b> (172)	BS34	1%	<b>4.8</b>
<b>MIDDLESBROUGH</b> (70)	TS8	1%	<b>4.8</b>
<b>MANCHESTER</b> (50)	M90	1%	<b>4.8</b>
<b>NORTH DEVON</b> (67)	EX33	1%	<b>4.8</b>
<b>SEDGEMOOR</b> (36)	BS26	2%	<b>4.8</b>
<b>EDEN</b> (80)	CA17	0%	<b>4.8</b>
<b>SOUTH GLOUCS</b> (69)	BS36	0%	<b>4.8</b>

WORST POSTCODES INSPECTED			
	Postcode	Scored lower than a 3	Average score
<b>POWYS</b> (63)	HR3	42%	<b>2.85</b>
<b>BEXLEY</b> (85)	DA16	39%	<b>2.84</b>
<b>SUTTON</b> (47)	SM6	34%	<b>2.83</b>
<b>BEXLEY</b> (56)	DA5	38%	<b>2.79</b>
<b>BEXLEY</b> (78)	DA8	45%	<b>2.78</b>
<b>BEXLEY</b> (65)	DA15	45%	<b>2.77</b>
<b>BEXLEY</b> (57)	DA17	48%	<b>2.68</b>
<b>CROYDON</b> (85)	SE25	44%	<b>2.65</b>
<b>KINGSTON-UPON-THAMES</b> (32)	KT4	44%	<b>2.63</b>
<b>BEXLEY</b> (66)	DA7	45%	<b>2.62</b>

We also looked at big chains and found that, while average scores are generally satisfactory, some have far more branches that score poorly than others – see p32.

## WHICH? SAYS

When we asked the public about food hygiene scores, three quarters said they wouldn't eat somewhere rated zero, one or two. However, it's not always easy to tell, as food outlets aren't required to display their ratings. Like 95% of you, we believe it should be mandatory for the score to be displayed clearly, and are campaigning on this so that it's easy to decide whether or not you want to eat there.

Scotland and Northern Ireland are looking into making this mandatory, while the Welsh government has already committed to this. There are, however, no plans to make it compulsory in England. We think it should be a requirement across the UK. We also want Tendring, Rutland and Greenwich to commit to using the scheme – they are the only local authorities in England that haven't yet done so.

## OUR RESEARCH

We analysed food hygiene ratings in England, Northern Ireland and Wales from 2011 onwards. Scotland's ratings aren't comparable. In March we asked 2,000 members of the public for their views on hygiene ratings. Food poisoning figures were extrapolated from this to the general population. ➤



**TELL US WHAT YOU THINK** Should outlets have to clearly display their food hygiene score? Have your say at [www.which.co.uk/hygienerating](http://www.which.co.uk/hygienerating)

## What do the scores mean?

Environmental health manager Rachel Glover explains the ratings

Any food business we inspect will be checked to make sure it is doing what the law requires and to ensure food safety. We use our professional judgment to rate the business against a national code, and work with colleagues in other areas to ensure scores are consistent across the country. The code includes three scores for hygiene, structure and confidence in management.

These are wide ranging, but as an example, hygiene includes looking for things like evidence of hand washing, good temperature control and good separation between raw and cooked foods. Structure includes things like cleanliness, standard of surface finishes, layout, lighting and ventilation. Confidence in management looks at how well they understand and manage food hygiene, including record keeping and staff training.

The Food Hygiene Rating is worked out by adding all three scores together. The scoring does mean that if a business does particularly badly in one area, the final score will be poor. A lower rating of zero, one or two might be the result of problems such as raw meat juices dripping onto cooked foods; high fridge temperatures or problems with mice or dirt.



A three is 'generally satisfactory' meaning that there are some issues to deal with, but these aren't deemed likely to put health at risk. A business might not be maintaining their cleaning as well as they should, or records haven't been kept up to date.

Many food businesses are good, but we do find problems. We've found evidence of rats in a kitchen, outlets trading after the water has been cut off, and even sewage overflowing in the kitchen. Action is taken in such cases to make sure there is no risk to health.

# High street chains – how do they stack up?

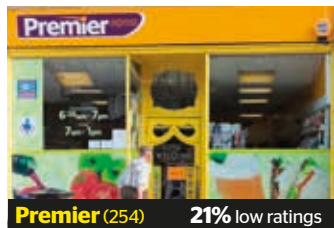
The average scores for big high street brands were typically three or above. Some major chains had no poor scores recorded at all – these included Carluccios, Eat, Marriot Hotels, Premier Inn and Zizzi. But in the data we looked at some chains had a greater proportion of branches with

poor scores. Below we show the major chains we looked at with more than 10% of their inspections rated below three. Some brands are franchised or independently run, including Best In/Best One, Chicken Cottage, Costcutter, Favorite, Londis, Nisa, Perfect Pizza, Pizza GoGo, Premier and Spar.

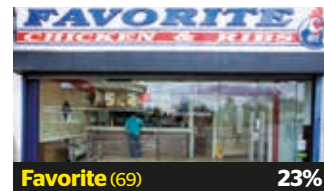
## RESTAURANTS



## CONVENIENCE STORES



## FAST FOOD & TAKEAWAY



## EXPERT VIEW

### Reclaim your meal

**Peter McCarthy | Lawyer**  
**Which? Legal Service**



If you get food poisoning after eating out you have two possible routes of redress.

If you're simply trying to reclaim the cost of the meal you ate, you can argue the restaurant is in breach of contract. Write to it and state that you wish to claim back the cost of the meal. Say that the Supply of Goods and Services Act made it a term of your contract with the restaurant that the food be produced using reasonable care and skill and that the food should have been of satisfactory quality – which it was not.

You may need to be able to prove that it was that food outlet that caused the food poisoning rather than something else you ate – this will be more straightforward if a group of you who ate at the same place all got food poisoning, or the food outlet owns up.

The other alternative is a personal injury claim. This allows you to claim for the illness as well as the meal. However you would need evidence – both medical and proving that that outlet caused the food poisoning – so it is advisable to take legal advice as soon as possible if you are considering going down this route.

If you think you've been given food poisoning you can contact your local environmental health department. And before you eat out, you can check the hygiene score on the FSA's website at [ratings.food.gov.uk](http://ratings.food.gov.uk).

The data covers inspections from January 2011 to March 2013. Not all branches of all chains will have been inspected. Some will have been inspected more than once. As there are spelling variations in the data, we only included ratings where we were sure it is part of a chain. Sample size in brackets.

## What the food outlets said

These companies generally told us that they had training and controls in place to ensure high standards. Some, such as Premier, Costcutter, Best In/Best One, Nisa, Londis, Perfect Pizza and Spar, said that their

stores were either independently run or franchised. La Tasca said it had new management since 2011 and both it and Londis said it had improved. Little Chef said it's taking action with lower-rated restaurants.

Pizza GoGo and Dixy Chicken both said that they believed that some stores listed under their names were not their own stores or had ceased to be part of their franchise.

Favorite said that many stores had seen improvements since the original rating. Chicken Cottage did not comment.