

ACCREDITATION CRITERIA FOR FOOD-HANDLING CERTIFICATION, MEDICAL TESTING, AND VACCINATION CENTRES IN NIGERIA

For Sub-national Adoption and Implementation

Prepared by

Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

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PREAMBLE AND PURPOSE

Foodborne diseases continue to pose significant threats to public health and national economic productivity. This Standard establishes uniform requirements for the subnational accreditation, regulation, compliance, enforcement and monitoring of centres conducting medical examination, testing, vaccination, and certification of food handlers in Nigeria.

It aligns with Codex Alimentarius (CXC 1-1969), ISO 22000 family of standards, ISO 15189 for medical laboratories, and WHO immunization service delivery guidance. It builds on the National Guideline for Food Handlers' Medical Tests (2024) and supports the National Policy on Food Safety and Quality and its Implementation Plan (NPFSQIP) and the National Environmental Health Practice Regulation (NEHPR).

1. SCOPE

This Standard applies to:

1. Public and private centres involved in food-handlers' **clinical examination, medical laboratory testing, vaccination, and certification**.
2. Facilities across all **tiers of government**, including hospitals, clinics, medical laboratories, and vaccination points.
3. Employers (food businesses), and workers, who depend on valid certifications to maintain safe food supply chains.
4. Regulators who enforce compliance.

2. NORMATIVE REFERENCES

1. Codex Alimentarius. *General Principles of Food Hygiene (CXC 1-1969)*
2. ISO 22000: *Food Safety Management Systems — Requirements*
3. ISO/TS 22003-1:2022: *Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification*
4. ISO 15189: *Medical laboratories — Requirements for quality and competence*
5. WHO: *Immunization in Practice & Vaccine Management Guidance*
6. FMHSW: *National Guideline for Food Handlers' Medical Tests (2024)*
7. FMHSW: *National Policy on Food Safety and Quality and its Implementation Plan (NPFSQIP, 2023)*
8. *National Environmental Health Practice Regulation (2024)*

3. DEFINITIONS

1. **Food Handler:** Any person directly engaged in handling, preparing, storing, serving, transporting, or selling food.
2. **Accredited Centre:** A health facility (public or private) licensed by SMoH/FCT to provide examination, testing, vaccination, and certification.
3. **Fitness Certificate:** An official, digitally verifiable document issued to a food handler following compliance with national requirements.

4. INTERPRETATION

In this Regulation, unless the context otherwise requires:

1. *"Accredited Centre"* means a health facility licensed by the State Ministry of Health to conduct food-handler examination, testing, vaccination, and certification.
2. *"Certificate"* means the medical fitness certificate issued under this Regulation, verifiable by QR code.
3. *"FMHSW"* means the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.
4. *"FMEnv"* means the Federal Ministry of Environment.
5. *"SMoH"* means the State Ministry of Health
6. "SMEnv" means the State Ministry of Environment
7. "*MLSCN*" means the Medical Laboratory Science Council of Nigeria.
8. "*MDCN*" means Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria
9. "*NMCN*" means Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria
10. "*EHCON*" Environmental Health Council of Nigeria
11. "*PCN*" Pharmacy Council of Nigeria
12. "*NiCFoST*" Nigeria Council of Food Science and Technology
13. *"SMoH"* means the State Ministry of Health.
14. *"Food Handler"* means any person directly engaged in preparing, serving, transporting, selling, or otherwise handling food.

5. GOVERNANCE AND OVERSIGHT

1. **Federal Ministry of Health & Social Welfare (FMHSW):**
    a. Sets national standards and technical guidelines.
    b. Hosts a **central digital verification portal** for certificates.
    c. Conducts periodic national performance reviews.
2. **Federal Ministry of Environment (FMEnv):**
    a. Ensure Compliance inspection and Enforcement action by the Licensed Environmental Health Officer (EHO)

b. Conduct Routine surveillance and Regulatory monitoring.
c. Sets National standards for Environmental investigation and Emergency Response.

3. **State Ministries of Health (SMoHs/FCT):**
    a. Grant subnational accreditation, renewals, and suspensions.
    b. Publish a list of accredited centres with mapped locations.
    c. Harmonize pricing across accredited centres.
4. **Professional Councils (MLSCN, MDCN, NMCN, EHCON, PCN, NiCFoST):**
    a. Enforce professional practice standards.
    b. Supervise medical laboratory and clinical competence.
5. **Food Business Owners (FBOs):**
    a. Employ only certified food handlers.
    b. Provide hygiene infrastructure
    c. Ensure periodic medical examination, testing and vaccination of the food handlers.
    d. Ensure that disposable towels and automatic hand dryers are provided for staff and customer usage.
    e. A Food handler suffering from an infectious disease or having an open wound, shall not handle food for public consumption until such food handler is certified, fit to function in that capacity by qualified medical practitioner approved by the health authority.
    f. Food handler shall undergo a food handler training annually and be issued a certificate as approved by the by the SMoH.
    g. A Food Business Owner including Mobile Food unit shall assume responsibility and ensure the establishment operates in full compliance with all applicable environmental health laws, regulations and standards.
    h. A worker handling meat carcass in abattoir shall be medically examined and issued a medical certificate of fitness endorsed by a qualified medical practitioner approved by the relevant health authority.
    i. Workers in the abattoir shall wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) as contained in relevant guidelines.

6. ACCREDITATION CATEGORIES

1. **Category A — Comprehensive Centres:** On-site clinical assessment, medical laboratory Services vaccination, and certification.
2. **Category B — Clinical Centres:** Clinical assessments; medical laboratory services and vaccination outsourced.
3. **Category C — Medical Laboratory Centres:** ISO 15189-accredited labs providing diagnostic services for A/B centres.

4. **Category D –** Vaccination Centres: Centres that meet NPHCDA guideline for vaccine storage and administration specifically for Hep A and Typhoid.

7. ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

7.1 General Standards (All Centres)

1. **Licensure:** Valid corporate and all relevant health professional licenses.
2. **Governance:** Designated Responsible Officer, SOP manuals, compliance with ISO 22000 principles.
3. **Infrastructure:** Adequate consultation room, waiting area, WASH facilities, PPE, disability access (advised), and fire safety.
4. **ICT/Data Systems:** Digital record-keeping, QR-code certificate issuance, compliance with Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR).
5. **Ethics:** Informed consent, patient confidentiality, clear grievance redress mechanism.

7.2 Clinical Standards

1. **Personnel:** Licensed medical doctors, and nurses. .
2. **Assessments:**
    a. Vital Signs
    b. History taking (symptoms, exposures).
    c. Physical examination (skin, eyes, GI symptoms, jaundice, fever).
    d. Exclusion of symptomatic handlers until treated and cleared.
3. **Frequency:** Minimum **6-monthly assessments**; immediate reassessment when symptomatic.

7.3 Laboratory Standards

1. **Quality Systems:** Compliance with ISO 15189, structured pathway to accreditation, or baseline assessment by MLSCN for Category C in section 6 .
2. **Tests Required:**
    a. Stool microscopy/culture and sensitivity.
    b. Hepatitis A antigen (or approved substitute).
    c. Additional pathogen testing as epidemiologically indicated (Salmonella Typhi, Vibrio cholerae, Shigella, etc.).
3. **Turnaround Time:** ≤72 hours.
4. **Safety:** BSL-2 compliance, waste segregation, safe transport, PPE use, spill protocols.
5. **Quality Assurance:** Mandatory participation in external quality assurance (EQA) schemes.
6. **Personnel:** Medical Laboratory Scientists and Medical Laboratory Technicians

7.4 Vaccination Standards

1. **Mandatory Vaccines:**
    a. **Typhoid (every 3 years)**.
    b. **Hepatitis A (Day 0 and 6 months)**.
2. **Optional/Contextual Vaccines:** Cholera, influenza, tetanus (depending on outbreak/seasonal risk).
3. **Service Delivery:**
    a. WHO-compliant cold-chain storage (2–8 °C).
    b. Continuous temperature monitoring (digital loggers).
4. **Staff:** Only trained, certified vaccinators allowed to administer vaccines.

8. CERTIFICATE ISSUANCE STANDARDS

1. **Validity:**
    a. Fitness Certificate: 6 months.
    b. Typhoid vaccine validity: 3 years.
    c. Hepatitis A vaccine validity: Life protection (Day 0 and 6-month booster)
2. **Format:**
    a. QR-code-enabled digital certificate linked to the FMHSW portal.
    b. Printable copy with unique serial number.
3. **Decisions:**
    a. Fit to Work.
    b. Temporarily Unfit (specify conditions).
    c. Unfit (refer for treatment).

9. EMPLOYER AND WORKER OBLIGATIONS

1. **Employers (FBOs):**
    a. Employ only certified handlers.
    b. Provide handwashing facilities, suitable Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), and sanitation infrastructure.
    c. Report illnesses promptly.
2. **Workers (Food Handlers):**
    a. Maintain hygiene standards (handwashing, PPE, reporting illness).
    b. Renew certificates on time.

10. ACCREDITATION PROCESS

1. **Application:** Facility submits staff credentials, infrastructure, SOPs, and QMS documents.
2. **Desk Review:** SMoH screens documentation.
3. **On-site Audit:** A Multidisciplinary assessment team evaluates infrastructure, HR, and practices.
4. **Decision:** Accreditation granted for 12 months.
5. **Monitoring:**
    a. One announced and one unannounced inspection per year.
    b. Random sampling of certificates.
    c. EQA checks for medical laboratories.
6. **Renewal:** Annual re-accreditation based on performance and compliance.
7. **Sanctions:** Warning, administrative fine (50% of the annual renewal fee), suspension, or withdrawal of accreditation approval for non-compliance.

11. MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND INDICATORS

1. **Core Indicators:**
    a. Percentage of food handlers certified.
    b. Percentage of excluded due to illness.
    c. Vaccination coverage rates (Typhoid, HepA).
    d. Medical Laboratory External Quality Assurance (EQA) pass rates.
    e. Turnaround times (medical laboratory results, certificate issuance).
    f. Rate of Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFIs) reported.
    g. Client satisfaction scores.
2. **Reporting:**
    a. Monthly reports from accredited facilities to SMoH.
    b. Quarterly consolidated reports from SMoH to FMHSW.
    c. Public dashboards with aggregated data.

12. RISK-BASED FLEXIBILITY

During **public health emergencies** (e.g., cholera outbreaks, Hepatitis A surges, or pandemic situations), SMoHs may:

1. Shorten certificate of fitness for food handlers.
2. Mandate additional vaccines.
3. Deploy mobile accreditation/vaccination teams.

ANNEX A: ACCREDITATION CHECKLIST

1. **Governance:** Valid licenses, SOPs, organogram.
2. **Clinical:** Examination rooms, privacy, consent forms, exclusion protocols.
3. **Medical Laboratory:** ISO compliance, EQA participation, biosafety protocols, consent forms.
4. **Vaccination:** Cold-chain logs, AEFI kits, trained staff.
5. **Data:** Secure EMR, QR code issuance, data backup.
6. **HR:** Qualified staff, CPD records.
7. **Client Care:** Waiting time, accessibility, feedback system.
8. **Equity:** Approved state tariff, fee waiver systems.

ANNEX B: SAMPLE ACCREDITATION CERTIFICATE

Federal Ministry of Health & Social Welfare
[State Ministry of Health Name]
Certificate of Accreditation
This is to certify that
[FACILITY NAME]
Located at: [Address]
has been duly accredited as a:

5. **Category A — Comprehensive Centres**.
6. **Category B — Clinical Centres**.
7. **Category C — Medical Laboratory Centres**.
8. **Category D – Vaccination Centres.**

for the purpose of Food Handler Medical Testing, Vaccination, and Certification under the National Standard for Food-Handling Certification (2025).
Accreditation No.: [Unique ID / QR Code]
Date of Issue: [DD/MMM/YYYY]
Valid Until: [DD/MMM/YYYY]
Signed: _____
(State Director of Public Health)
Seal/Stamp: _____
Verification: Scan QR code or visit [FMHSW Portal link]

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