

# TEMPERATURE CONTROL

The Food Safety Standards specify that potentially hazardous foods must be stored, displayed and transported at safe temperatures .

Safe temperatures are 5°C or colder, or 60°C or hotter. Potentially hazardous food needs to be kept at these temperatures to prevent food-poisoning bacteria, which may be present in the food, from multiplying to dangerous levels. These bacteria can grow at temperatures between 5°C and 60°C, which is known as the temperature danger zone. The fastest rate of growth is at around 37°C, the temperature of the human body.



To ensure that your *potentially hazardous foods* are kept within the required temperature ranges it is essential that you have a probe thermometer with a digital read out that can measure the internal temperature of the food. This is because the surface temperature may be warmer or cooler than the temperature of the rest of the food. The thermometer must be accurate to +/- 1°C. This means that when the thermometer shows a temperature of 5°C, the actual temperature will be between 4°C and 6°C. The thermometer must be available for use when foods are being prepared, so you may need more than one if foods are prepared in different places.

Remember to clean and sanitise the thermometer before inserting it into food. Wash the probe in warm water and detergent to remove any grease and food particles. Sanitise using alcohol wipes or your food grade sanitiser then allow the probe to air dry or thoroughly dry it with a disposable towel.

## Which are the risky foods?

The risky foods which could be potentially hazardous include:

- Raw and cooked meats and food containing meat, such as sliced deli meats, smoked meat, poultry or seafood, pate, casseroles, curries, lasagne and meat pies;
- Dairy products and foods containing dairy products, such as milk, cream, custard, baked goods containing cream or custard, soft cheeses (although they can be allowed to ripen at room temperature for a few hours) and dairy-based desserts;
- Seafood (excluding live seafood) and food containing seafood, such as seafood salad, fish cakes, cooked fish or shellfish;
- Prepared fruits and vegetables, such as prepared salads, cooked vegetables, cut melon, sprouted seeds and ready to eat fruit packs;
- Cooked rice, pasta dishes and fresh pasta;
- Cooked or processed foods containing eggs, beans, or other protein-rich food, such as Soya bean products, e.g. quiche, hard boiled eggs, soy milk, bean curd or fresh bean noodles;
- Some gravies and sauces such as mayonnaise, aioli and tartare;
- Foods that contain any of the above foods, such as sandwiches, rice salads and pasta salads.

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Council's Environmental Health Officers can be contacted between the hours of 8.30am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday.



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## Keeping cold food cold

Your fridge should operate at a temperature that keeps food at or below 5°C. It is not recommended to rely on the fridge thermometer as they can sometimes be inaccurate. A good practice is to keep a bottle or glass of water in the warmest section of the fridge and label it 'test water—do not drink' (change the water every week). Insert a probe thermometer into the test water at least twice a day and this will give an accurate core temperature of the stored food. You will need to keep records of the results, which show the date, times and temperatures of the tests.



When you are storing food, make sure that you have enough fridge space. It is important to remember that fridges won't work properly when they are overloaded or when food is packed tightly, because the cold air cannot circulate around the food. If you are running out of room in your fridge, remove foods that are not potentially hazardous, such as soft drinks. The temperature of these foods is not critical and they can be kept cool in insulated containers with ice or cold packs.

Freshly cooked food, not for immediate consumption, should have the temperature reduced as quickly as possible. Put it into the fridge as soon as it stops steaming.

## Keeping hot food hot

Hot food needs to be kept and served at 60°C or hotter. If you are holding it warm for someone who will be eating later, put it in the oven set above 60°C. If you think the food will dry out before it is eaten, cool the plate or container until the steam stops rising and pop it into the fridge. Is it safe to eat food which has been in the Danger Zone? Use the 2 hour / 4 hour guide below to give you the answer. It tells you how long potentially hazardous food can be held safely at temperatures in the Danger Zone.

### 2-hour / 4-hour storage rule

Means the alternative to temperature control that is specified in the Food Standards Code. Where potentially hazardous ready-to-eat food has been kept between 5°C and 60°C for:

- Up to 2 hours it can be refrigerated or used immediately,
- Between 2 and 4 hours must be used immediately, and
- Up to a total of 4 hours or more must be thrown out.

### 2-hour / 4-hour cooling rule

Means the requirement to cool cooked food:

- Within two hours—from 60°C to 21°C, and
- Within a further four hours—from 21°C to 5°C.

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## Checking temperatures of food

- Determine the warmest area of a cool room or fridge or the coldest area of a hot display unit.
- Insert the clean, dry probe into the food.
- Remember that temperature readings are not instant - wait until the temperature has stabilised before reading.
- Stabilise the thermometer between measuring hot and cold foods by allowing the thermometer to come back to room temperature.
- If the food is packaged or frozen, place the length of the probe between two packages of the food.

## How to check the accuracy of your thermometer

Thermometers have to be accurate to ensure that temperatures are correctly measured. It is best to have your thermometer regularly checked and maintained by the supplier of the thermometer. However, if you would like to check the accuracy of your thermometer yourself, use the following method.

- Place some ice into a container with a small amount of cold water. The ice should not float if the correct amount of water is used.
- Mix into a slurry and insert the thermometer probe.
- Leave if for about three minutes.
- Check and note the temperature. It should read 0°C.
- Do this three times and compare the temperatures recorded.
- If they vary by more than 1°C, get your thermometer checked by the supplier.

And for safety's sake remember the 6 key tips:

- Keep hot food above 60°C
- Keep cold food refrigerated below 5°C
- Cook food properly
- Separate cooked, raw and ready to eat foods
- Clean and sanitise all eating and drinking utensils, food processing equipment and surfaces and keep the kitchen clean.
- Wash hands with soap and warm water and dry thoroughly.

Further information on temperature control is available in The Food Standards Australia Guideline *Temperature Control of Potentially Hazardous Food*, available in the food guidelines section on Council's website.

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