

## ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

No. 205

### *TEMPERATURE CONTROL*

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

- Safe temperatures are 5°C or colder, or 60°C or hotter. Potentially hazardous foods need to be kept at these temperatures to prevent food-poisoning bacteria, which may be present in the food from multiplying to dangerous levels
- You can also use time, rather than temperature to keep food safe. This is known as the 2 hour / 4 hour guide discussed below. Records must be kept if using this method.

#### WHAT ARE POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS FOODS?

Potentially hazardous foods are:

- foods containing raw and cooked meats including casseroles, pies and sandwiches
- dairy products and processed foods containing eggs, beans and nuts
- seafood
- processed fruits and salads such as prepared salads and ready to eat fruit packs
- cooked rice and pasta.

#### THE 2 HOUR / 4 HOUR GUIDE

- Potentially hazardous foods should be kept at 5°C or colder or above 60°C wherever possible however ready-to-eat foods can safely remain between 5°C and 60°C provided it is **less than four hours**. This is because it takes more than four hours for food-poisoning bacteria to grow to dangerous levels.
- The 2 hour / 4 hour guide only applies to ready-to-eat potentially hazardous foods and the time refers to **the life of the food**, including preparation and cooling, not just to display times. So please remember to include the total time.

Total time limit between 5°C and 60°C	What you should do
Less than 2 hours	Refrigerate or use immediately
Between 2 hours and 4 hours	Use immediately
More than 4 hours	Throw out

#### THERMOMETERS

- Every food premises that prepares, handles or sells any potential hazardous foods must have a thermometer to ensure food is kept at safe temperatures. The thermometer must be accurate to  $\pm 1^\circ\text{C}$ .
- Remember the temperature at the centre of the food may be different from the surface temperature, therefore when checking the temperature please make sure that you check the centre.

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***How do I use the thermometer to measure the temperature of food?***

You may find the following tips useful, when using your thermometer:

- make sure that the thermometer is clean and dry
- place the probe into the food and wait until the temperature reading has stabilised before reading the temperature
- measure different parts of a food as the temperature may not be the same, for example, if food is being cooled in a refrigerator the top of the food may be cooler than the middle of the food
- clean and sanitise the thermometer after measuring the temperature of one food and before measuring the temperature of another food
- if using the thermometer to measure hot and cold food, wait for the thermometer to return to room temperature between measurements
- measure the temperature of different foods in a refrigerator or display unit as there will be colder and hotter spots within the refrigerator or unit
- measure the temperature of packaged chilled food by placing the length of the thermometer between two packages - the temperature will be approximate but the package remains intact.

***How do I clean and sanitise the thermometer?***

As the probe of the thermometer will be inserted into food, the probe must be cleaned and sanitised before it is used to measure the temperature of a different food. If the probe is not cleaned and sanitised, food poisoning bacteria may be transferred from one food to another food. This is especially important when the thermometer will be used to measure the temperature of raw food and then cooked food, for example, a raw hamburger patty and then a cooked hamburger patty.

The probe of a thermometer can be cleaned and sanitised by using the following steps:

- washing the probe with warm water and detergent
- sanitising the probe in an appropriate way for your thermometer (alcohol swabs are often used)
- rinsing the sanitiser away if necessary (refer to the instructions on the sanitiser)
- allowing the probe to air dry or thoroughly drying it with a disposable towel.

***Do I need to maintain the thermometer?***

You will need to maintain the thermometer in good working order. This means that you must replace batteries if they are flat and repair or replace the thermometer if it breaks. You will also need to maintain the accuracy of the thermometer. This means that you should make sure it is calibrated correctly on a regular basis. You could do this by following the instructions that come with the thermometer or by asking the business you bought it from for advice on when it should be calibrated, how this should be done, and who should do it.