

# Potentially hazardous food

Potentially hazardous foods are foods that must be kept at 5°C or colder or at 60°C or hotter, to minimise the growth of food poisoning bacteria that may be in the food, or to stop the formation of toxins.

Examples of potentially hazardous foods include:

- raw and cooked meat, or foods containing meat such as casseroles, curries and lasagne
- dairy products such as milk, custard and dairy-based desserts
- seafood (excluding live seafood)
- processed or cut fruits and vegetables, such as salads
- cooked rice and pasta
- foods containing egg, beans, nuts or other protein-rich food such as quiche and soy products
- foods containing raw eggs such as mayonnaise, aioli and hollandaise
- foods that contain any of the above foods including sandwiches and rolls.

If your business receives, displays, transports or stores potentially hazardous food in the temperature danger zone (between 5°C and 60°C), you must ensure that 2-hour/4-hour rule is followed.

## Reheating potentially hazardous food

Potentially hazardous food that requires reheating must be reheated rapidly (in under 2 hours) to 60°C or hotter. Potentially hazardous food should be discarded and never reheated a second time.

- hot holding equipment(such as a bain maire or warmer) must never be used to reheat food
- food should be reheated to above 70°C for at least 2 minutes if it is to be hot held
- ensure the hot holding equipment is clean and pre-heated before use
- temperature setting on hot holding equipment must be set to keep food at 60°C or hotter
- do not overload hot holding equipment.

## Cooling potentially hazardous food

If potentially hazardous food is to be cooled after cooking, it must be cooled to 5°C or colder as quickly as possible. Food poisoning bacteria may still be on food even after cooking and by cooling food faster, you reduce the time that bacteria are able to grow.

Food should be cooled:

- from 60°C to 21°C in a maximum of 2 hours; then
- from 21°C to 5°C within a further maximum period of 4 hours.

To cool foods quickly, separate food into smaller batches and store in shallow containers in the cool room.

## 2-hour/4-hour rule

The 2-hour/4-hour rule provides guidance on how long potentially hazardous food can be held safely at temperatures **between** 5°C and 60°C (temperature danger zone). The time refers to the life of the food, including preparation, cooling and display, so it's important to add up the total time the food was between 5°C and 60°C.

## Checking temperatures of food

To measure the temperature of potentially hazardous foods:

- use a clean and sanitised probe thermometer
- insert the probe into the centre of the food
- temperature readings are not instant, wait until the temperature has stabilised before reading
- allow the thermometer to come back to room temperature before using again measuring other foods

Remember that the temperature at the centre of food may be different from the surface temperature. For example, when cooked food is being cooled in the refrigerator, the centre of the food will take the longest to cool. Therefore, when checking the temperature, make sure that you check the centre by placing the thermometer into the middle of the food.

**Remember: If in doubt,  
throw it out!**

### Total time between 5°C and 60°C

0–2 hours



2–4 hours



over 4 hours

