

Food Safety Standards - Temperature control requirements

Chapter 3 (Australia Only), Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code

NOTE: The Food Safety Standards do not apply in New Zealand. The provisions of the food standards treaty between Australia and New Zealand do not include food hygiene standards.

Standard 3.2.2 Food Safety Practices and General Requirements sets out specific requirements for keeping potentially hazardous food at specified temperatures and for cooling and reheating. Food businesses must comply with these requirements unless they can show that they have a safe alternative system in place to ensure that food stays safe to eat.

Which foods have to be kept under temperature control?

Potentially hazardous foods must be kept under temperature control.

Which foods are ‘potentially hazardous foods’?

Potentially hazardous foods are foods that might contain food poisoning bacteria and are capable of supporting growth of these bacteria or formation of toxins to levels that are unsafe for consumers, if the foods are not stored at correct temperatures. Toxins are poisonous chemicals produced by some types of bacteria.

The following are examples of potentially hazardous foods:

- raw and cooked meat or foods containing meat, such as casseroles, curries and lasagne;
- dairy products, for example, milk, custard and dairy based desserts;
- seafood (excluding live seafood);
- processed fruits and vegetables, for example, salads;
- cooked rice and pasta;
- foods containing eggs, beans, nuts or other protein rich foods, such as quiche and soy products;
- foods that contain these foods, such as sandwiches and rolls.

Which foods are not potentially hazardous foods?

Many preserved foods do not contain food poisoning bacteria. Also, bacteria will not grow in some types of food. Examples include canned and bottled food, dried fruit, salted dried meats, fermented dried meats, yoghurts, hard cheeses, spreads, some sauces, dried pasta, breads and dried foods.

However, some foods that are not potentially hazardous can become potentially hazardous if you alter the food in some ways. For example, dry custard powder is not potentially hazardous but when milk or water is mixed with the powder to make custard, the custard is potentially hazardous.

Some foods may not be potentially hazardous but need refrigeration to stop them from spoiling. It is an offence to sell spoiled food.

When must food be kept under temperature control?

You must ensure that the temperature of potentially hazardous food is either at 5°C or colder or at 60°C or hotter when it is received, displayed, transported or stored. If you want to receive, display, transport or store potentially hazardous food at another temperature, you must be able to show an enforcement officer that you have a safe alternative system in place.

You do not have to keep potentially hazardous food at any specified temperature when you are processing or preparing it because that would be impractical, but you must keep the processing or preparation time as short as possible so that bacteria do not get a chance to multiply to dangerous levels or form toxins.

Cooling potentially hazardous food

If you cook potentially hazardous food that you intend to cool and use later, you need to cool the food to 5°C or colder as quickly as possible. There may be food poisoning bacteria in the food even though it has been cooked. Faster cooling times limit the time when these bacteria are able to grow or form toxins.

The standards require food to be cooled from 60°C to 21°C in a maximum of two hours and from 21°C to 5°C within a further maximum period of four hours. Alternatively, if you want to cool food over a longer time period you must be able to show that you have a safe alternative system in place.

If you don't know how fast your food is cooling, use a probe thermometer to measure the warmest part of the food – usually in the centre. For information on the use of thermometers, see the fact sheet 'Thermometers and using them with potentially hazardous food'.

To chill food quickly; divide it into smaller portions in shallow containers. Take care not to contaminate the food as you do it.

Reheating previously cooked and cooled potentially hazardous food

If you reheat previously cooked and cooled potentially hazardous food, you must reheat it rapidly to 60°C or hotter. Ideally, you should aim to reheat food to 60°C within a maximum of two hours to minimise the amount of time that food is at temperatures that favour the growth of bacteria or formation of toxins.

This requirement applies only to potentially hazardous food that you want to hold hot, for example, on your stove or in a food display unit. It does not apply to food you reheat and then immediately serve to customers for consumption, for example, in a restaurant or a take away shop.

How can a business comply with the temperature control requirements?

The simplest way to meet the requirements is to ensure that potentially hazardous food is received, stored, displayed or transported either very cold (5°C or colder) or very hot (60°C or hotter). Potentially hazardous food should also be cooled and reheated quickly and prepared in as short a time as possible.

If for some reason you do not wish to, or are unable to store, display or transport food at 5°C or colder, or at 60°C or hotter, or meet the cooling and reheating time and temperature requirements, you must be able to show that you have a safe alternative system in place.

The standard specifies the ways in which a food business can demonstrate to an enforcement officer that it is using a safe alternative system. You can use a food safety program, or follow recognised food industry guidelines, or use a system based on sound scientific evidence.

Need more information?

Copies of the standards, the guides to these and other fact sheets and supporting material can be found on the FSANZ website (<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/>). Food businesses may also seek advice directly from the Environmental Health Officers at their local council, or from their State or Territory health or health services department and Public Health Units. Information can also be accessed through the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing <http://www.health.gov.au/>.

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