

Food Handling Alert!

Top 20 -

Monitoring Time and Temperature

According to the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation, the most commonly reported cause of foodborne illnesses is time-temperature abuse. Consider the following to prevent an outbreak at your foodservice establishment.

1. Do not leave food in the Temperature Danger Zone (41 to 135 degrees Fahrenheit) for more than four hours. Employees must monitor time and temperature as food flows through the kitchen, from receiving to storage, to ensure that the foods they serve are safe.
2. Managers must assign someone to check the temperature of time-sensitive foods when they arrive at the restaurant, before they are received and stored. If the temperatures register in the danger zone, the food should not be accepted and the supplier should be made aware of the problem so they can prevent it from happening in the future.
3. Monitor temperature regularly to ensure that the internal temperature of the stored foods does not register above 41 degrees Fahrenheit.
4. Avoid overloading the refrigerator because it diminishes airflow and makes the unit work harder to maintain the correct temperature. Do not use foil or paper lining along shelves, as this prevents airflow as well.
5. Check food temperature regularly by randomly selecting a sample of food from different locations throughout the refrigerator unit to ensure the temperature is correct and consistent.
6. Do not place hot or warm food in the refrigerator as this may increase the temperature of the interior and put other food in the temperature danger zone.
7. Keep the temperature of the refrigerator approximately two degrees lower than the recommended food temperature to ensure that food is being held at a proper temperature.
8. Rotate food regularly using the FIFO (First In, First Out) system. All containers should be clearly marked with the contents and the "use-by" date, and the shelf life of each product must be tracked. Foods that have passed their expiration date should be discarded immediately.
9. Check the temperature of the unit and the internal temperatures of the food routinely.
10. Similar to refrigerated foods, do not place warm and hot food inside the freezer area because it might increase the temperature inside and begin to thaw some types of food.
11. Never refreeze thawed food unless it has been cooked thoroughly as multiple thawings may lower the quality and compromise the safety of the food. If food is cooked and then frozen, any microorganisms present should be reduced to a safe level during the cooking process.
12. Keep the storeroom cool, dry, out of direct sunlight and well ventilated.
13. Monitor the temperature of the storeroom regularly to ensure that it reads between 50 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit.
14. Maintain a humidity level of 50 to 60 percent. Use a hygrometer to measure the humidity of the storeroom.
15. All shelving should be at least six inches off the floor and six inches from the wall to limit access to food by pests and rodents.
16. Place thermometers both in the front and back of the storage area to ensure proper temperature control.
17. The internal temperatures of all products should always be checked before they are served.
18. Use the two-stage method to properly cool food.
The two-stage method states that foods should be cooled from 135 degrees Fahrenheit to 70 degrees within two hours and then to 41 degrees or lower in an additional four hours for a total cooling time of six hours. Food also can be cooled using the one-stage method, in which hot foods must be cooled from 135 degrees Fahrenheit to 41 degrees within four hours by using an ice water bath or other preferred method of cooling.
19. When reheating food, make sure it reaches 165 degrees Fahrenheit for at least 15 seconds. If the food's temperature falls below 135 degrees, that food must be reheated. If this cannot be done in the allotted time or if foods have spent more than four hours in the temperature danger zone, they must be discarded.
20. Remind customers of proper handling of leftovers by labeling all take-out containers with recommendations on storing and reheating their food.