

Food Temperatures

WHAT

Food safety is a crucial element in preventing food contamination.¹ Food related illness can lead to vomiting, diarrhoea and stomach cramps and is potentially fatal for older frail people.² Ensuring food is correctly handled, prepared and served is vital to preventing food contamination. Maintaining food at the correct temperature is a key element of food safety.²

Thermometers and heated trolleys are useful tools to ensure food is kept at the correct temperature for safe consumption.

WHY

Certain bacteria found in food survive the heating process.² Once the food cools, bacteria begin to multiply.

Bacteria can contaminate food in two ways:

- Harmful bacteria multiply to large amounts in the food
- Poisons are produced as a result of large amounts of bacteria multiplication

HOW

Maintaining food at the correct temperature prevents bacteria multiplication and contamination. Hot food must be kept above 60°C and cold food must be kept below 5°C.² Bacteria grow most rapidly between these temperatures and the longer it takes the food to reach the safe temperature, the more time bacteria have to grow.²

A number of foods are more hazardous and sensitive to temperature. Extra care must be taken to ensure these foods are kept within the best temperature zone to prevent contamination.

These include:

- Raw or cooked meat or food containing cooked meat (stew, casserole, lasagne)³
- Dairy products (cream, custard, milk)³
- Cooked rice or pasta³
- Salads + sandwiches³
- Seafood³
- Foods high in protein (eggs, nuts, beans)³

REDUCING THE RISK

SERVING PROCEDURE

- A thermometer is necessary to ensure that food is being delivered, stored, cooked, cooled and reheated at a safe temperature.¹
- The facility must use a thermometer that can be inserted into food to check the internal temperature.⁴ A digital probe thermometer that is accurate to +/- 1°C is recommended.¹ Using a probe thermometer allows you to accurately check the food is heated or cooled thoroughly and is therefore safe for residents to eat.
- Probe thermometers must be cleaned, dried and sanitised between every use to prevent cross contamination eg checking the temperature of a raw meat followed by a hot casserole without cleaning the probe would potentially spread bacteria to the hot meal, causing contamination rather than preventing it.¹
- Heated trolleys are used to keep food hot whilst it is being delivered to residents. The temperature of the food should be monitored before serving. Food must be held in heated trolleys above 60°C.

COOLING PROCEDURE

- Thaw all food in a refrigerator – this minimises bacterial growth¹
 - Make sure that the juice of red meat doesn't contaminate other foods as it thaws (eg place on bottom shelving to thaw)¹
- Hot food must be cooled from 60°C to 21°C in a maximum of two hours and from 21°C to 5°C in a maximum of four more hours.³
- Break large portions of food into smaller portions to cool more quickly.³

HEATING PROCEDURE

- Hot food must be kept above 60°C. Food that is served hot should never be reheated in a Bain Marie.¹
- When reheating previously cooked food, it must be done rapidly to 72°C and held for 2 minutes at that temperature.²
- Do not reheat food more than once.¹ Throw away any leftover food.



This information sheet is designed to be used in conjunction with HACCP standards

1. Bartl R, Bunney C. *Best Practice Food and Nutrition Manual for Aged Care Facilities*. Gosford: Australian Nursing Home and Extended Care Association 2004.
2. Food Standards Australia New Zealand. *Essential food safety practices. Cool and reheat food safely - to the right temperatures*. In: Food Standards Australia New Zealand, ed. 2001.
3. Food Standards Australia New Zealand. *Food Safety Standards - Temperature control requirements*. In: Food Standards Australia New Zealand, ed. 2001.
4. Food Standards Australia New Zealand. *Food Safety Standards - Thermometers and using them with potentially hazardous food*. In: Food Standards Australia New Zealand, ed. 2001.