October 2013, Volume 5 Issue 2

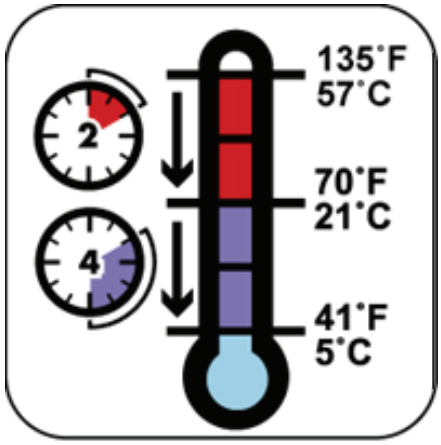
Food for thought

A newsletter for Fairfax County food establishment owners and operators and their employees

Be Cool About *Cooling*

Sometimes it is necessary to prepare foods in advance and store them for later use. This requires cooling! Because cooling from hot to cold takes the food through the "Danger Zone" (135°F - 41°F), certain steps must be followed to prevent foodborne bacteria from growing during the cooling process. Cooling is one of the processes that can lead to time and temperature abuse, which is a risk factor for foodborne illness.

Cooling food properly helps to ensure food safety. Cooling can start on the counter top, but once the food reaches 135°F, the "cooling clock" begins! Foods must be cooled from 135°F to 70°F within 2 hours and from 70°F to 41°F within an additional 4 hours, for a maximum total of 6 hours. Placing hot foods in the walk-in refrigerator overnight is not a good cooling method!



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There are many reasons why food does not cool quickly, including:

- **Size of the Food Portion—**A large amount of food will take longer to cool than a small amount;
- **Food Density—**A pan of lasagna, for example, will take longer to cool than a container of broth; and
- **Food Container—**Cooling food in a deep pan of food will take longer to cool than in a shallow pan.

These are some of the methods that may speed up the cooling process:

- Separate the food to be cooled into smaller or thinner portions;
- Place the food to be cooled in shallow pans;
- Use metal storage containers when possible; they transfer heat more rapidly;
- Place the food container in an ice bath; stir foods regularly to reduce heat;

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Food Safety Reminders

- Wash Hands Often!
- Don't handle ready-to-eat foods with bare hands.
- Report symptoms of foodborne illness to management.
- Food must come from an approved source.
- Cook foods to proper temperatures.
- Use a food thermometer!
- Keep hot foods ***HOT*** — above 135°F.
- Keep cold foods ***COLD*** — below 41°F.
- Keep foods out of the ***Danger Zone*** (41°F - 135°F).
- Wash, rinse and sanitize food-contact surfaces regularly.
- Wash Hands Often!

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What is Date Marking?

Ready-to-eat, potentially hazardous food that is prepared in the restaurant and kept in a refrigerator for more than 24 hours must be date marked. A date mark is also referred to as a "use by date." Ready-to-eat, potentially hazardous food that is prepared in the restaurant may be kept refrigerated for up to 7 days. Day 1 is the day on which the food was prepared. Day 7 is the "use by date." When the food has been prepared and will be kept in the refrigerator for more than 24 hours, the "use by date" must be marked on the food container. This process is called "date marking." The food must be eaten, sold or discarded by the "use by date." For example, lasagna that is made on November 1 must be marked with a use by date of November 7. There is a total of seven days that the lasagna may be kept in the refrigerator. After the seventh day, the food must be discarded.

In addition, when commercially-prepared ready-to-eat, potentially hazardous food is opened for use in the restaurant, it must be date marked if the food will be stored in a refrigerator for more than 24 hours. The same seven-day limit applies to commercially-prepared foods. A package of deli meat, for example, that is opened on November 1 should be marked with a "use by date" of November 7. After the seventh day, the food must be discarded.

What foods need to be date marked?

If you answer YES to all five questions below, then the food needs to be date marked.

1. Does the food require refrigeration?
2. If commercially packaged, has the original package been opened?
3. Is the food ready-to-eat? ("Ready-to-eat" means the food can be eaten just as it is, regardless of temperature. Ready-to-eat foods include cold, cooked deli meats, boiled eggs and cold, cooked macaroni.)
4. Is the food potentially hazardous? Will it grow bacteria?
5. Will the food be kept for longer than 24 hours?

Date marking must be used even if the foods already have an expiration date on them. The expiration date on a packaged food is a manufacturer's food quality date. Date marking is a food safety date.

If the date-marked food is refrigerated and then placed in a freezer, the use by date will be extended. For example, if food is prepared today, refrigerated for three days and then frozen for four days, the food may then be kept refrigerated for another four days in the refrigerator—there are a total of seven days in the refrigerator. After the seventh day in the refrigerator, the food must be discarded.

For more information on date marking, contact your local inspector or the Health Department at 703-246-2444, TTY 711.

Be Cool About Cooling

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- Add ice as an ingredient to the cooked food; or
- A combination of the above methods.

The most important thing to remember about cooling food is that it must reach 41°F as quickly as possible.

Use a food thermometer to take temperatures of the food regularly as it cools and take measures to speed up the process if it is not cooling quickly enough. When you find a method of cooling which works well in your operation, make it a standard that all employees follow. You should keep a cooling log to track the temperatures over the two-hour and the four-hour cooling periods. A sample cooling log is available on the Health Department's website at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/food/foodtrain.htm.

For more information about proper cooling, visit the Health Department website, call 703-246-2444 or speak directly to your area inspector.

Permit Renewals are Coming!

Your Permit to Operate a Food Establishment expires on December 31, 2013. Permit renewal applications are sent to all permitted food establishments starting in October. Please return the renewal application and fee as soon as possible. If you have any questions, you may call 703-246-2444.

Stay Connected!

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