

Temperature Danger Zone

5°C ← Danger Zone → 60°C

Bacteria can grow quickly to unsafe levels between 5°C and 60°C in food – the temperature danger zone. Food should generally be kept at 5°C or below. Hot food should be kept at 60°C or above. The low temperature prevents bacteria from multiplying to dangerous levels, while high temperatures kill bacteria and viruses. So, avoid the temperature danger zone.

Foods that are at risk are:

- raw meats, cooked meats and food containing meat, such as casseroles, curries, lasagne and meat pies;
- dairy products and foods containing dairy products (milk, cream, custard) and dairy-based desserts;
- seafood (excluding live seafood) and food containing seafood, such as seafood salad;
- processed fruits and vegetables, such as cooked vegetables and ready-to-eat fruit packs;
- cooked rice and pasta;
- processed foods containing eggs, beans, nuts or other protein-rich food, such as quiche and soya bean products;
- vegetables, garlic or fresh herbs in oil where a food acid does not appear on the ingredient list;
- gravies and sauces; and
- sandwiches and salads that contain the above foods.

Keep food cold

Your fridge should be kept below 5°C. A fridge thermometer can be placed just inside the fridge door to help you monitor the temperature. Your fridge will not work properly if is overloaded or packed tightly. This prevents the cold air from circulating around your food and keeping it cool. If you are running out of room in your fridge, remove foods that are not potentially hazardous, e.g. soft drinks. They can be kept cool in insulated containers with ice or ice packs.

Freshly cooked food not for immediate consumption should have the temperature reduced as quickly as possible. When cooling cooked food place food into shallow containers to assist cooling. Food should be cooled:

- within 2 hours – from 60°C to 21°C; and
- within a further 4 hours – from 21°C to 5°C

Keeping food hot

Hot food needs to be kept and served at 60°C or hotter. If you think the food will dry out before it is eaten, cool the plate or container until the steam stops rising and place into the fridge. If you are keeping food hot on cook tops, in ovens or in bain marie units, the equipment needs to be set high enough to ensure that the food remains hot (60°C or hotter).

Is it safe to eat food that has been in the danger zone?

Use the 2 hour/4 hour guide. It tells you how long potentially hazardous food can be held safely at temperatures in the danger zone.

Total time limit between 5°C and 60°C	What you should do
Less than 2 hours	Refrigerate or use immediately
Between 2 hours and 4 hours	Use immediately
More than 4 hours	Throw out

Remember the 6 key tips:

- keep hot food steaming hot
- keep cold food refrigerated
- cook food properly and thoroughly
- separate raw and cooked foods
- keep kitchen and utensils clean
- wash hands often with soap and dry thoroughly with a clean towel.

Need more information?

Useful websites: www.foodsafety.asn.au
www.foodstandards.gov.au

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