

# Operator's Edge

The Successful Independent Operator's Resource

## Keeping Cold Food Cold

The following are procedures restaurateurs should follow to keep food cold during preparation, storage, cold holding, cooling and receiving.

### Preparation

\* The first step in food preparation often is thawing the food that will be served. If the food is thawed improperly, foodborne microorganisms can grow and make it unsafe. Thaw food in the refrigerator at temperatures of 41 degrees F or lower.

\* Submerge any frozen product in cold running water (70 degrees F or lower). Make sure the thawed product doesn't drip water onto other products or food-contact surfaces.

\* Food may be thawed in a microwave oven, only if it will be cooked immediately afterward; microwave thawing can actually start cooking the product, so don't use this method unless the food will be cooked immediately after thawing.

\* Food may be thawed as part of any cooking procedure, as long as the product reaches its recommended minimum internal cooking temperature. (i.e., frozen hamburger patties can go straight from the freezer onto the grill without being thawed first.)



### Storage

\* Keeping food as cold as possible, without freezing it, keeps it safe and may also extend its shelf life if kept out of the temperature danger zone (41 degrees F to 140 degrees F).

\* When storing foods for a picnic or other outdoor entertaining, maintain cold foods at 41 degrees F or lower. If purchasing take-home food from a restaurant, be sure to ask for the proper storage temperatures.

\* Store perishable foods, such as meats, tuna salad and eggs, in airtight containers. Place the containers inside well-iced coolers. Don't overload a refrigerator, which may prevent adequate airflow and make the unit work harder to stay cold.

### Cold Holding

\* The delivery and catering of food offers opportunities for temperature abuse, as does the purchasing of take-home food from a restaurant. To ensure food is safe while being cold-held, food must stay cool and out of the temperature danger zone (41 degrees F to 140 degrees F).

\* Use covers and wrappers to retain food temperatures.

\* Place cold food in chilled gel-filled containers or in bowls of ice if mechanical equipment is not available or practical.

\* If food is being delivered or catered, don't be afraid to ask the delivery person to show you the temperature of the food upon arrival. Items should be in rigid, insulated containers capable of maintaining food temperatures at 41 degrees F or lower to transport food.

### Cooling

\* If cooked food will not be served immediately or if you have leftovers, it must be cooled as quickly as possible to prevent it from becoming unsafe.

\* Reduce the size of the food being cooled. Divide hot food into smaller quantities, or put food into shallow pans.

\* Use ice-water baths to bring food temperatures down quickly. After dividing food into smaller quantities, put the pans in a clean sink or large pot filled with ice and water.

**Receiving**

- \* Temperature abuse of potentially hazardous food can cause it to become unsafe and customers to become ill. With the recent popularity of online grocers and food delivery services, be mindful of the risk of foodborne illness and do not be afraid to refuse or return any product that does not meet your standards or appear to be at the proper temperature.
- \* Inspect cold food immediately for both temperature and quality. Fish and seafood can quickly become unsafe if temperature is abused. Toxins can form and foodborne microorganisms can grow. Fish should be received at 41 degrees F or lower. Shellfish should be received at 45 degrees F or lower.
- \* If receiving frozen delivery items such as meats, check to see if there are any signs of freezer burn, moisture, or tears to packaging. Potential contamination may have occurred due to exposure.

Source: National Restaurant Association