

Hot and Cold Holding Temperatures Fact Sheet

All potentially hazardous foods, except those prepared for immediate consumption by a patron, shall be maintained in such a fashion as to prevent the growth or development of bacteria. When holding foods for service, such as on a buffet line, always remember to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Hot-holding equipment must be able to keep foods at a temperature of 135°F or higher, and cold-holding equipment must be capable of keeping foods at a temperature of 41°F or colder.

Hot-Holding Guidelines

When holding hot foods for service, observe the following guidelines:

- Stir the food at regular intervals, as it will help distribute heat evenly throughout the food.
- Keep the food covered as covering will help retain heat and eliminate potential contaminants from falling into the food.
- Use a food thermometer to measure the food's internal temperature every two hours.
- Discard any hot food after four hours if it has not been maintained at a temperature of 135°F or higher.

Other safety precautions regarding hot-holding foods include never using hot-holding equipment to reheat foods. Foods to be reheated should first be heated to an internal temperature of 165°F and then transferred to the hot-holding equipment. Also, never mix freshly prepared food with foods being held for service as this practice can result in contaminated foods.

Cold-Holding Guidelines

When holding cold foods for service, the following guidelines can help prevent food-related illnesses:

- Protect all foods from possible contamination by covering them or using food shields.
- Use a food thermometer to measure the food's internal temperature every two hours, and take corrective action whenever the temperature of a cold food item goes above 41°F.
- Never store food items directly on ice. All food items, with certain exceptions, should be placed in pans or on plates when displayed. Ice used on a display should be self-draining, and all pans and plates should be sanitized after each use.

Whenever you are dealing with questionable hot and cold-holding practices, always resolve the issue in favor of food safety. It is better to discard potentially hazardous foods than risk your customer's health or safety. One way to avoid discarding too much food is to prepare and cook only as much food as you will use in a short period of time.

**For more information about operating a food establishment,
contact your local health department.**