

Food Safety Fact Sheet

Temperature Danger Zone

INTRODUCTION

The temperature danger zone is the temperature range in which microorganisms grow quickly and sometimes reach levels that can make people ill. School nutrition employees must maintain appropriate temperatures throughout the food process, from receiving, until the food is served to children. Temperature control is a key component of a school food safety program.

HERE ARE THE FACTS

The FDA *Food Code* has identified the temperature danger zone as 41 °F–135 °F. The saying “Keep hot food hot and cold food cold” is based on the importance of keeping food out of the temperature danger zone. In other words, cold foods must be kept at 41 °F or below and hot foods must be kept at 135 °F or above. It is important to limit the amount of time that foods served cold or hot are in the range of 41 °F to 135 °F.

APPLICATION

Remember to:

- Cook, hold, serve, and chill foods at proper temperatures.
- Use a clean, sanitized, and calibrated thermometer to take food temperatures.
- Record temperatures.
- Maintain temperature logs.

Maintain temperatures at each operational step in the foodservice process from receiving to storing.

- Receiving—Receive refrigerated foods at 41 °F or below, and frozen foods at 32 °F or below.
- Storing—Store refrigerated foods at 41 °F or below, and store frozen foods at 0 °F or below.
- Preparing—Limit the time that food is in the temperature danger zone during preparation. Batch cooking is the best way to limit time.
- Cooking—Cook food to the appropriate temperature for that item.
- Holding—Hold cold foods at 41 °F or below and hot foods at 135 °F or above.
- Serving—Serve cold food cold and hot food hot. Keep cold food below 41 °F and hot food above 135 °F.
- Cooling—Cool foods as quickly as possible. The FDA *Food Code* requires that foods be cooled from 135 °F–70 °F within 2 hours and from 135 °F–41 °F within a total of 6 hours. If food is not cooled from 135 °F–70 °F within 2 hours, the food must be reheated to 165 °F for 15 seconds and the cooling process started over. Take actions to speed the cooling process such as dividing food into smaller portions, using ice water baths, using an ice paddle, and stirring.
- Reheating—Reheat all leftover foods to 165 °F for 15 seconds within 2 hours.
- Transporting—Transport cold foods cold at 41 °F or below, and hot foods hot at 135 °F or above.

Remember, follow state or local health department requirements.





Temperature Danger Zone cont.

References

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