

Thawing, Cooling and Reheating Food

Fact sheet

Everyday, Council's Environmental Health Officers (EHO's) work with residents and local businesses to help make our city what it is today with a long term vision for the future.

Thawing

Freezing is an excellent way of extending the life of foods. However, thawing potentially hazardous food such as raw meat, poultry and seafood can easily cause outbreaks of food poisoning if some simple rules are not followed.

The safest place to thaw food is in the refrigerator. Ensure that juices resulting from thawing do not contaminate other foods while food is defrosting.

Defrosting frozen potentially hazardous food may pose a food safety risk if the time the food is within the temperature danger zone is prolonged.

Methods of thawing food include:

- **Refrigerator**
This is the preferred method for thawing food as the food will be maintained at or below 5°C. Place food defrosting in the refrigerator in a drip tray container and store below cooked, ready-to-eat and raw food
- **Microwave**
This is the fastest option so food will be in the temperature danger zone for a limited time. Ensure that food thawed in a microwave is not cooked during the process of thawing, but cooked immediately afterwards
- **Running water**
Not recommended due to possible contamination of food during the thawing process. It is important to monitor the food and remove it as soon as it is thawed to ensure it is not kept at temperatures above 5°C.
- **Room temperature**
Not recommended as there is a greater likelihood that the thawed portion of the food will reach temperatures greater than 5°C.

You should always ensure that food has **defrosted all the way through before cooking** and that once defrosted food **should never be frozen again**

Cooling food

Potentially hazardous foods should be cooled as quickly as possible. The temperature should fall from 60°C to 21°C in less than two hours and reduced to 5°C or colder in the next four hours.

Some examples of how to cool food correctly:

- when cooling large amounts of food, the food item should be divided into smaller amounts
- food does not need to be placed in the refrigerator as soon as cooking has finished. Food can be left to cool at room temperature until it drops to 60°C as long as it is not left out for more than four hours
- try to place food on rack shelves rather than solid shelves so that cool air can move around and cool the food faster
- use a probe thermometer to check how fast your food is cooling and record results in a cooling food temperature log.
- use rapid-cooling equipment (e.g. a blast chiller)
- stir liquid foods such as gravy often, using a clean and sanitised utensil
- use water or ice water baths
- allow air to flow freely around the cooling container (e.g. on a rack rather than the floor)
- add ice as an ingredient

Reheating Food

Potentially hazardous food must be heated rapidly to a temperature of 60°C or above. This minimises the amount of time food is in the temperature danger zone and prevents the growth of bacteria

Tips for reheating food safely:

- never reheat cold food in bain maries pie warmers or other equipment designed only to hold food hot - this is likely to take too long or not heat the food enough to keep it safe—use a microwave, oven or stove to rapidly reheat it to at least 60°C
- the time taken to reheat cooked food to 60°C should not be more than two hours
- smaller quantities will heat quicker, so where possible reheat in small portions
- products should only be reheated once.

Further information

For further information on Food Safety visit <https://www.coorong.sa.gov.au/council-services/environmental-and-public-health/food-safety>

Email: council@coorong.sa.gov.au