

Safe method: Defrosting

Harmful bacteria can grow in food that is not defrosted properly.



Safety point

Food should be thoroughly defrosted before cooking (unless the manufacturer's instructions tell you to cook from frozen or you have a proven safe method).

Why?

If food is still frozen or partially frozen, it will take longer to cook.

The outside of the food could be cooked, but the centre might not be, which means it could contain harmful bacteria.



How do you do this?

Do you check food is thoroughly defrosted before cooking?

Yes

If not, what do you do?

Options for defrosting food

1. Ideally, plan ahead to leave enough time and space to defrost small amounts of food in the fridge.

Putting food in the fridge will keep it at a safe temperature while it is defrosting.

Do you use this method? Yes

How much time do you allow for defrosting?

2. If you cannot defrost food in the fridge, you could put it in a container with a lid and then place it under cold running water.

Cold water will help to speed up defrosting without allowing the outside of the food to get too warm.



Do you use this method? Yes

Which foods do you defrost in this way?

3. Or you could defrost food in the microwave on the 'defrost' setting.

This is a fast way to defrost food.

Do you use this method? Yes

Which foods do you defrost in this way?

Safety point

4. You could also defrost food at room temperature. For ready-to-eat foods (foods that will not be cooked or reheated after defrosting), e.g. cheesecake, follow the manufacturer's defrosting instructions. If you are defrosting foods that you have prepared yourself, leave them out at room temperature for the shortest time possible. Ideally, defrost these foods in the fridge.

Why?

Foods will defrost quite quickly at room temperature, but harmful bacteria could grow in food if it gets too warm while defrosting.



How do you do this?

Do you use this method? Yes

Which foods do you defrost in this way?

5. If you have another method of defrosting, write the details here:

Which foods do you defrost in this way?

Think twice!

Keep meat/poultry separate from other food when it is defrosting, to prevent cross-contamination. Once food has been defrosted you should use it immediately (within one day).

Check it

When you think food has defrosted, it is important to check to make sure.

Why?

The outside may look defrosted but the inside could still be frozen.

How do you do this?

1. Check for ice crystals in the food using your hand or a skewer.

Do you use this check? Yes



2. With birds, check the joints are flexible.

Do you use this check? Yes



3. If you use another check, write the details here:

What to do if things go wrong

- If food has not fully defrosted, continue to defrost the food until no ice crystals are left. Test again before cooking or reheating.
- Speed up the defrosting process e.g. by using cold water or a microwave (see the front of this sheet).
- Use an alternative menu item. If you do not have time to defrost for longer, replace the dish with a similar dish that is ready to serve.

How to stop this happening again

- Change your defrosting method and make it safer, e.g. defrost smaller amounts.
- Make sure you allow enough time to defrost.
- Train staff again on this safe method.
- Improve staff supervision.
- If you defrost lots of food in your business you may wish to consider creating extra fridge space or using a special defrosting cabinet.



Write down what went wrong and what you did about it in your diary.

