

Chilling food correctly in your business

How to chill, freeze and defrost food safely in your business.

Chilling

Chilling food properly helps to stop harmful bacteria from growing. Some foods need to be kept chilled to keep them safe, for example:

- food with a use-by date
- cooked dishes
- other ready-to-eat food such as prepared salads and desserts

It is very important not to leave these types of food standing around at room temperature. Make sure that you:

- follow storage instructions
- put food that needs to be chilled in the fridge straight away to keep it cool
- cool cooked food as quickly as possible and then put it in the fridge
- keep chilled food out of the fridge for the shortest time possible during preparation
- check regularly that your fridge and display units are cold enough

When you are serving or displaying cold foods, they can be kept outside the fridge for up to four hours. If any food is left after this time, you should either:

- throw it away
- put it back into the fridge

You can find more information on chilling down hot food in our [Safer food, better business for caterers pack](#).

Your fridge temperature

Cold food must be kept at 8°C or below. This is a legal requirement in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In practice, it is recommended to set your fridge at 5°C or below to make sure that food is kept cold enough and allow for any fluctuations in temperature. Check regularly that your fridge and any display units are cold enough.

Food safety coaching video – Chilled storage and display

How to keep foods cold in a fridge or display unit to keep food safe.

Food safety coaching video – Chilling foods

Ways of chilling foods down as quickly as possible.

Freezing

It is important to take care when freezing food and to handle frozen food safely:

- put frozen food in the freezer as soon as it is delivered
- if you are freezing fresh food, freeze it as soon as it has been delivered or prepared
- divide food into smaller portions and put it in containers or freezer bags before freezing
- if you freeze food that has a 'use-by' date to use later, make sure you freeze it before the use-by date is past and clearly note the date you are freezing it - you will also need to use the food within 24 hours of thawing
- label food you freeze so you don't end up with Unidentified Frozen Objects (UFOs)
- leftovers and homemade goods should be frozen as soon as possible
- cool dishes before putting them in your freezer
- wrap food well in freezer bags or a suitable food wrap

Certain [fishery products](#) intended to be eaten or lightly cooked raw need to be frozen before use.

Information on freezing food before the expiry of the 'use-by' date can be found in the [WRAP labelling guidance](#).

You can find more information on freezing in our [Safer food, better business for caterers pack](#).

Defrosting

Ideally, you should defrost food in the fridge. Putting food in the fridge will keep it at a safe temperature while it is defrosting.

If you cannot defrost food in the fridge, you could put it in a container and then place it under cold running water. Raw meat and poultry, including large joints and whole birds, should not be defrosted under cold running water unless they are in a sealed container.

You could also defrost food in the microwave on the 'defrost' setting.

Other things to remember when defrosting food:

- always clean surfaces, chopping boards, utensils and hands thoroughly with warm soapy water after they have touched raw or thawing meat to stop bacteria spreading around the kitchen (see [our guidance on preventing cross-contamination](#))
- you can freeze food again once cooked, but you'll only be able to reheat it once after that
- freezing in individual portions will help you defrost only what you need

FSA Explains

The Danger Zone

The cold temperatures of a commercial freezer (-18°C to -21°C) delays the deterioration of foods and prevents the normal growth of any bacteria that may be present.?

The bacteria haven't been killed, and they may be revived as the food defrosts. Defrost food in the fridge to prevent it sitting in between 8 - 63°C, which is the Danger Zone.??Between these temperatures the bacteria may grow and make you ill.?Generally, the colder the temperature, the slower bacteria will grow - but cold temperatures don't stop bacteria growing altogether (for example,?[listeria monocytogenes](#)).

That's why we advise that the safest way to defrost food is in the fridge overnight. By defrosting in the fridge, your food should never enter the 'Danger Zone'.

Food should be thoroughly defrosted before cooking unless the manufacturer's instructions tell you to cook from frozen.

You can find more information on defrosting in our [Safer food, better business for caterers pack](#).

Remember: When you start a new food business or take over an existing business, [you must register with your local authority](#).