Avoid the Temperature Danger Zone

Foods that could give you food poisoning should be kept below 5 degrees Celsius or, for hot food, above 60 degrees Celsius. Low temperatures prevent food poisoning bacteria, which may be present in the food, from multiplying to dangerous levels. High temperatures will kill bacteria and viruses. Because bacteria can grow to unsafe levels between 5 degrees and 60 degrees we call it the **Temperature Danger Zone**.

Which Are The Risky Foods?

The risky foods which could be potentially hazardous include:

- cooked meats and food containing meat, such as sliced deli meats, smoked meat, poultry or fish, pate, casseroles, curries, lasagne and meat pies;

- dairy products and foods containing dairy products, such as milk, cream, custard, baked goods containing cream or custard, soft cheeses (although they can be allowed to ripen at room temperature for a few hours) and dairy-based desserts;

- seafood (excluding live seafood) and food containing seafood, such as seafood salad, fish cakes, cooked fish or shellfish;

- prepared fruits and vegetables, such as prepared salads, cooked vegetables, cut melon, sprouted seeds and ready to eat fruit packs;

- cooked rice, pasta dishes and fresh pasta;

- cooked or processed foods containing eggs, beans, or other protein-rich food, such as soya bean products, e.g. quiche, hard boiled eggs, soy milk, bean curd, fresh bean noodles;

- vegetables, garlic or fresh herbs in oil where a food acid does not appear on the ingredient list;

- gravies and sauces; and

- foods that contain any of the above foods, such as sandwiches and salads.

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Keeping Cold Food Cold

Your fridge should be kept below 5 degrees Celsius. If possible keep a fridge thermometer in the fridge to check that the temperature stays around 4-5 degrees Celsius.

When you are storing food, make sure that you have enough fridge space. It is important to remember that fridges won't work properly when they are overloaded or when food is packed tightly, because the cold air cannot circulate.

If you are running out of room in your fridge, remove foods that are not potentially hazardous, such as drinks. The temperature of these foods is not critical and they can be kept cool in insulated containers with ice or cold packs.

Freshly cooked food, not for immediate consumption, should have the temperature reduced as quickly as possible. Put it into the fridge as soon as it stops steaming.

Keeping Hot Food Hot

Hot food needs to be kept and served at 60 degrees Celsius or hotter. If you are holding it warm for someone who will be eating later, put it in the oven set at above 60°C or at 100°C if that is as low as your oven will go. If you think the food will dry out before it is eaten, cool the plate or container until the steam stops rising and pop it into the fridge.

Is It Safe To Eat Food Which Has Been In The Danger Zone?

Use the 2 hour/4 hour guide below to give you the answer. It tells you how long potentially hazardous food can be held safely at temperatures in the Danger Zone.

Total Time Left Between 5 Degrees Celsius And 60 Degrees Celsius

What you should do

Less than 2 hours

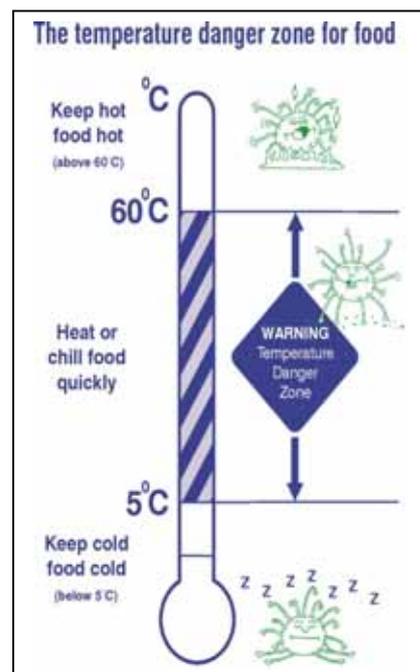   *Refrigerate or use immediately*

Between 2 hours and 4 hours

   Use immediately

More than 4 hours

   Throw out

And for safety's sake remember the 6 key tips…..

- Keep hot food steaming hot

- Keep cold food refrigerated

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- Cook food properly

- Separate raw and cooked foods

- Keep kitchen and utensils clean

- Wash hands with soap and dry thoroughly.

Need more information?

Hawkesbury City Council has food handling seminars, three times per year. To get further information on food safety in Hawkesbury or the seminars, please contact Lesley Maybury on ph 02 4560 4571.

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