Processing food safely

If you're a food business that processes food, it's important to use correct processing techniques so the food stays safe to eat.

Safe Food Australia InfoBite

What are the requirements?

Under Standard 3.2.2 - Food Safety Practices and General Requirements, food businesses must ensure all food is processed in a way that keeps it safe and suitable.

This means the food is protected from contamination, processed using known safe techniques and kept at a safe temperature.

Reduce your risk

Start with safe food

- ✓ Before you process food, make sure it is safe and suitable (e.g. ingredients from reliable suppliers, safely stored, inspected).

Prevent food contamination

- ✓ Make sure food handlers know how to correctly use processing equipment and maintain good hygiene.
- ✓ Keep food processing areas clean.
- ✓ Clean and sanitise food contact surfaces before use (e.g. chopping boards, cutting and mixing blades, probe thermometers).
- ✓ Use separate equipment or areas for preparing raw and ready-to-eat foods, or clean thoroughly between uses.

Use processing steps known to achieve food safety

- ✓ Know the critical limits for temperature, time, pH and water activity used for your food processing steps.
- ✓ When cooking or pasteurising, ensure the time and temperature makes food safe (e.g. cook chicken and mince to an internal temperature of ≥75°C).
- ✓ When using other processes such as acidification, fermentation and drying, make sure the food reaches the correct critical limit (e.g. pH ≤4.2 to prevent *Salmonella* growth).

Keep food at safe temperatures

- ✓ For potentially hazardous food, keep it cold, keep it hot or make it quick. See next section.

For potentially hazardous food:

- Minimise the time food spends in the temperature danger zone (between 5°C and 60°C).
- Keep track of this time to keep food safe: generally, it should not exceed 4 hours.

Rapidly cool cooked foods:

- ➢ within 2 hours, from 60°C to ≤21°C
- ➢ then within the next 4 hours, from 21°C to ≤5°C.

Check food during cooling to be sure these times and temperatures are met.

Tips for faster cooling:

- portion foods into shallow containers
- use rapid cooling equipment (e.g. blast chillers)
- frequently stir foods with cleaned and sanitised utensils
- use ice or iced water baths
- check cool air can circulate around food containers.

Rapidly reheat cook-cooled foods:

- Reheat foods to ≥60°C as quickly as possible (e.g. by microwave or oven) *before* transferring to hot-holding equipment such as bain maries.
- Avoid repeated heating and cooling, to reduce the time food is in the danger zone.

Need more information?

Safe Food Australia is a guide to the food safety standards of Chapter 3 of the Food Standards Code. Processing food is under 3.2.2 clause 7. Potentially hazardous food is explained in Appendix 1, using time as a control is in Appendix 2, critical processing limits are in Appendix 3, useful templates are in Appendix 8. Copies of the guide and other materials are available at www.foodstandards.gov.au or email information@foodstandards.gov.au