



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH County of Riverside

INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN NO. 113-16-DES

DISTRICT ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DIVISION

HOT AND COLD HOLDING

WHAT IS A POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS FOOD?

A potentially hazardous food is a food that is commonly referred to as “perishable.” Most harmful bacteria can multiply quickly while living in or on a potentially hazardous food (PHF) if left at room temperature. Some examples of PHF are meat, seafood, dairy products, eggs, and even foods that have been cooked. We have to handle PHF very carefully in order to limit the growth of bacteria. Bacteria can be naturally found in food, or can get into food by bad food handling practices. Bacteria become dangerous when they are given the chance to multiply.



WHY SHOULD I KEEP MY FOOD HOT OR COLD?

It takes time for bacteria to multiply and, in the right conditions, the number of bacteria can double as quickly as every 20 minutes. Bacteria will grow and multiply with the right amount of time, temperature, moisture, and food source. Bacteria will grow in PHF causing it to go bad which could make you become ill after consuming the food. The best way to keep bacteria from growing in food is to keep the food at the right temperature. There are two ways to do this. You can either keep these foods cold at or below 41°F or you can keep these foods hot at or above 135°F.

The temperature range between 41°F and 135°F is called the
“temperature danger zone” because these are the
temperatures where bacteria multiply quickly.

WHY SHOULD I USE A THERMOMETER?

Thermometers are the only way to know for sure if the food is at a safe temperature. You should keep a reference thermometer on hand to check temperatures frequently. Keep a reference thermometer in your refrigerator to make sure the inside is 41°F or cooler. Keep in mind that the refrigerator doors are opened and closed many times throughout the day and cold air comes out each time. In order to make sure that the food inside stays at 41°F or cooler, the refrigerator should be set to a lower temperature, like 38°F.

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It is also important to have a probe thermometer so that you can check the temperature inside of both hot and cold food. Remember to check the internal temperature of food:

1. During cooking to make sure it is cooked properly
2. When food is cooling to make sure it cools quickly (within 6 hours)
3. While being held hot or cold to make sure it is kept at the right storage temperature

Examples of reference thermometers



Examples of probe thermometers



HOW CAN I KEEP TRACK OF MY FOOD TEMPERATURES?

Using a temperature log like the one below can help you keep track of food temperatures inside a refrigerator or steam table. If a temperature problem occurs you will have a timeframe indicating how long a specific food has been out of temperature. You can then determine an appropriate corrective action to ensure consumers are safe from harmful bacterial growth and possible foodborne illness.

*Document available in an alternate format upon request

