Safe Food Cooling Guidelines

Methods to keep food safe and consumers healthy!

All food cooling processes must achieve the following regulations for optimal food safety:

Step 1: Food must cool from 135°F to 70°F within 2 hours.

Step 2: Food must finish cooling from 70°F to 41°F within 4 hours.

1 Shallow Pan Method

Divide large containers of food into several shallow pans to cool. This method works well for foods like refried beans, rice, potatoes, casseroles, ground meat, meatloaf, and chili.
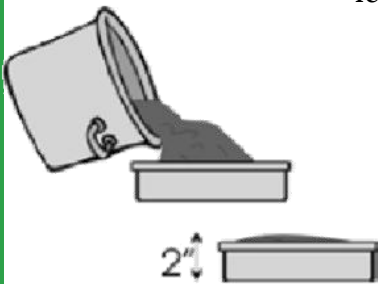
1. Put hot food into shallow pans. **Make sure the food is not more than 2 inches thick or deep.**
2. Put the pans in the refrigerator **on the top shelf** where nothing can drip into them.
3. Let air move around the pans – **do not stack or cover the pans**.
4. Cover the pans after the food is 41°F or colder.

2 Reduce Size Method

A large whole food like turkey or ham may be cut into slices to be cooled.

1. Cut the cooked meat into pieces no more than 4 inches thick.
2. Spread the slices out on a tray so they are not touching each other.
3. Put the trays in the refrigerator on the top shelf where nothing can drip into them.
4. Let air move around the trays – **do not stack or cover them**.
5. Cover the pans after the food is 41°F or colder.

3 Rapid Cooling Method

Food may also be cooled using rapid cooling methods such as an ice bath (shown here). The usage of ice or blast chillers can be helpful in quickly and safely reducing the temperature of foods such as soups, sauces, and gravy.

1. Close the drain in the sink. Put the pot of hot food in the sink.
2. Fill the sink with ice up to the level of the food in the pot. Add cold water to the ice.
3. Stir the food often. Make sure it cools down to 70°F within 2 hours.
4. Add more ice as the ice melts.
5. Finish cooling the food to 41°F within a total of 6 hours.
6. Once the food is 41°F, cover it and put in the refrigerator.