Section 4 – Food preparation, cooking and serving.

Objectives

- Defrosting frozen foods
- Preventing the contamination of food during preparation, cooking and serving
- Cooling and freezing foods
- Microwave defrosting of food

Temperature checklist

Danger zone: +5 to 63°C

Cook foods to above: 70°C for 2 min

Hold hot foods above 63°C

Refrigerated foods: 0 to 5°C

Freeze foods below: -18°C

Reheat foods to a minimum core temperature of 70°C for at least 2 minutes to prevent any bacteria from surviving.

At times it may be necessary to reheat food. However, it is safer to serve freshly cooked food as surviving bacteria will not be able to multiply and cooking is the most effective medium for destroying bacteria.

Food must be cooled quickly after cooking to minimise bacterial multiplication. Large food products, for example a joint of meat, may take a long time to cool. To cool in the most hygienic of methods the product should be placed in a ventilated store for 90 minutes then chilled.

Defrosting

- Frozen foods must be thoroughly defrosted before cooking, in a chiller, microwave or specialist defrosting unit
- Food cannot be refrozen unless it has first been cooked

Potential risks when defrosting

- Risk of bacterial regeneration during thawing and thus higher numbers of bacteria
- The risk of additional contamination
- The risk of enzyme/structural damage to the food during in freezing
Prevention of food contamination during food preparation

- Separate work areas, utensils, equipment for fish, meats and vegetables/salad
- Wash food in a designated food preparation sink using potable water only
- Minimise the time that food is left in the danger zone
- Minimise handling of food

Prevention of contamination during holding and serving

- Never handle food that is ready to eat.
- When keeping food cold it must be kept below 5°C
- When keeping food hot it must be kept above 63°C
- Hot food must be served within 90 minutes of cooking

Cooling foods

Use the following methods to cool food more rapidly through the danger zone

- Decanting
- Portioning
- Chilling

Freezing and reheating

- Food should be suitably wrapped or placed in sealed containers
- Freeze food in portions
- Label and date food to aid stock rotation
- Allow air circulation
- Food should not be reheated more than once
- Reheat to a minimum core temperature of 70°C for 2 min

Microwave defrosting of frozen food

Microwaves provide a method of cooking food. Food cooks from the outside inwards. Heat not the microwaves kills the bacteria. Microwaves also provide a fast method of defrosting foods: it is important to ensure that food products are defrosted through to the core.
Taking temperatures

It is a legal requirement to ensure food is cooked to and stored at certain temperatures. In order to ensure these temperatures are being met the following measuring devices can be used and it may be useful to record all temperatures.

- Hard probe thermometer. When using a probe thermometer it should be properly calibrated, and cleaned using hot water and detergent after use. Before re-using the thermometer it should be disinfected with anti-bacterial wipes.

- Infra red probe thermometer

You must ensure to check the **core temperature** with a thermometer. The core is the centre or thickest part of the food.