COOKING SAFELY AT HOME:
TEMPERATURE MATTERS

Keeping food at the right temperature.

Paying close attention to cooking temperatures is very important to avoid foodborne illness.

WHY TEMPERATURE CONTROL IS IMPORTANT

Certain high-risk foods, particularly those that contain protein (meat, poultry, fish, dairy) as well as ready-to-eat and cooked rice products, must be kept out of the danger zone temperatures (41° – 135° F) (5° – 57 °C), which support growth of potentially harmful disease organisms.

Microorganisms include bacteria, viruses, molds and yeasts and could cause illness. The risk of food poisoning can be reduced if high-risk foods are kept outside the danger zone.

Food poisoning for any individual is extremely unpleasant, but for people who have other medical conditions it could be potentially catastrophic, resulting in hospitalization or even death.

HOW TO KEEP FOOD OUTSIDE THE DANGER ZONE

Follow these simple control steps when producing high-risk foods.

Keep HOT food HOT: Store or display high-risk food above 135° F (57° C) until it is served.

If the temperature of the food product drops below 135° F (57° C), it can be served at that temperature for a single period of up to two hours, reheated to a temperature of 135° F (57° C), as quickly as possible, or cooled quickly to a suitable temperature (see Cool Hot Food Quickly below).

Keep COLD food COLD: Store or display high-risk food below 41° F (5° C).

If the temperature of the food rises above 41° F (5° C), it can be served at that temperature for one single period of up to four hours. After four hours, the food must be discarded.

COOL HOT FOOD QUICKLY

GOLDEN RULE

THE GOLDEN RULE is to cook only as much food as you think you will use. The less food you have to cool down, the more effective your cooling process will be!

If you intend to serve hot food at a later date/time (for example, more than two hours after it has been cooked) and you have no means of keeping the food hot (above 135° F, 57° C), then ensure that you cool all high-risk foods as quickly and as safely as possible. Cool any hot food from 135° F (57° C) to 70° F (21° C) within 2 hours and from 70° F (21° C) to 41° F (5° C) or less within the next 4 hours for a total cooling time of 6 hours.

There are many options available to cool food quickly and safely. These include:

- Using your freezer to more rapidly chill your leftovers
- Dividing the hot foods into smaller, or shallower, portions to speed up the cooling process
- Rinsing food (like rice, pasta and vegetables) under cold running drinking water in a strainer to more quickly cool food
- Stirring the foods (if liquid) in addition to the options listed to help release the heat. Avoid covering any food until it has been cooled to avoid condensation in the storage container.
- Adding ice to the food (if this can be done without adversely affecting the food) or by placing the food in ice baths:
  - If you are placing ice into food, make sure that it has been made with clean drinking water in a clean and sanitized tray. Alternatively, you may wish to purchase pre-formed bagged ice cubes from a supermarket. Ice made from unclean water or with dirty equipment is likely to make food unsafe to eat.
  - To create an ice bath, place ice cubes in a larger outer tray/ container and fill partly with cold water. Then place the food you intend to cool quickly into smaller containers that can be positioned inside the larger container. If you intend to use the sink as your ice bath, ensure that it has been cleaned and sanitized before use.

NOTE: *Always be sure to check and comply with your local regulatory requirements for hot and cold temperatures. All temperature references are from the FDA Food Code 2017.*

COOKING TEMPS

Proper internal cooking temps

Cook all foods to the proper temperature. Here are a few types of foods to guide you:

Whole or ground poultry	165° F (74 °C)
Ground meats, fish or game animals (other than poultry)	155° F (68 °C)
Fresh fin fish	145° F (63 °C)
Fresh pork, beef, veal or game animals	145° F (63 °C) with a three-minute rest time

CONTACT US:

For questions about cooking, food safety or other food related topics, email **info@nsf.org** or give us a call.

NSF cares. We are here to help if you have any questions!