



A Guide to Storing Food under the Four-hour/Two-hour Rule

Potentially hazardous food should be stored, displayed and transported under temperature control, that is, below 5°C or above 60°C. Some food businesses, however, may choose to adopt an alternative method of temperature control. One of the alternative methods of temperature control is referred to as the four-hour/two-hour guide. To prevent the growth of bacteria that may cause food poisoning, the food business must be sure to apply this alternative method properly.

Four-hour/two-hour guide

The four-hour/two-hour guide relates to how long potentially hazardous food may remain outside of temperature control. Please note that the timeframes below relate to the total time a particular food is outside of temperature control including time during preparation, storage, display and transport.

Under two hours

Food must be used or placed back under temperature control (5°C or less or 60°C or greater).

Two to four hours

Food must be used immediately – it cannot be re-refrigerated.

Four hours plus

Food must be discarded – it may have harmful levels of bacteria

Example 1

A food business wishes to display chicken and ham sandwiches in a non-refrigerated display cabinet during the busy lunch time period. In order to do this they wish to apply the four-hour/two-hour guide. Therefore the following is necessary:

- The food business must ensure that the chicken and ham has not

undergone any prior temperature abuse. The chicken and ham must have come from a reputable supplier who is able to provide written advice that the products have been kept below 5°C during manufacture and transport to the food premises.

- To be safe the food business should carry out temperature checks of the food upon arrival at the food business and record these temperatures.
- Upon arrival the products should be immediately placed under refrigeration or any time they are not should be documented.
- The time taken to make up the sandwiches must be recorded as this is time that the products are outside of temperature control.
- The sandwiches can then be displayed in the non-refrigerated cabinet for the remaining period of time according to the four-hour/two-hour guide.
- For example, if the chicken and ham had been kept under temperature control up until the delivery at the premises, then left for 30 minutes prior to being placed in the cool room, then removed from the cold room to make up sandwiches that took 30 minutes. The chicken and ham have been outside of temperature control for a total of one hour. There is only a further one hour before the sandwiches can be either used or refrigerated, a further one to three hours before they must be used or a further three hours before they are to be discarded.
- In the event that an Environmental Health Officer arrives at the premises to carry out an inspection, the food business must be able to present the written documentation of how long the sandwiches have been outside of temperature control and be aware of what action must be taken once the time limits have expired.

Example 2

Using the four-hour/two-hour guide for food that has been previously cooked and cooled.

The four-hour/two-hour guide may be used where food has been cooked and cooled in accordance with the Food Safety Standards. For example after cooking rice it is then allowed to cool from 60°C to 21°C within the two hours and then from 21°C to 5°C within a further four hours. This food may then be held outside of temperature control in accordance with the four-hour/two-hour guide.

To be safe it is best to always store and display food under temperature control and if in doubt do not sell food you suspect may be contaminated or that may have been subjected to temperature abuse.

For more information on this topic phone Council's Environmental Health Unit on (07) 4977 6821.

How can you contact us?



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