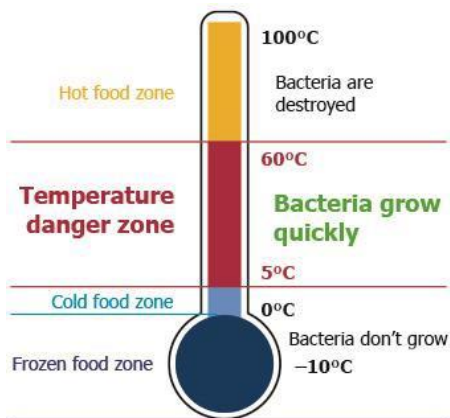


2-HOUR / 4-HOUR RULE

Temperature control is very important to prevent harmful bacteria from growing in food. Food businesses should minimise the time that food spends in the so-called 'temperature danger zone' to keep food safe. This means cold food should be kept at 5°C or below and hot food should be kept at 60°C or above (see the diagram below).



However, because bacteria can take time to grow to high enough numbers to cause food poisoning, the Food Standards Code provides an alternative method for temperature control that allows food businesses to hold food between 5°C and 60°C, but only for short and measured periods of time.

What is the 2-hour / 4-hour rule?

Studies show that food can be safely held out of temperature control for short periods of time without significantly increasing the risk of food poisoning. The Safe Food Australia 3rd Ed (2016) provides guidance on the use of time as a control for potentially hazardous food. The time that food can be safely held between 5°C and 60°C is referred to as the '2-hour / 4-hour rule' (see the diagram):



The time between 5°C and 60°C is cumulative — that means you need to add up every time the food has been out of the fridge, including during preparation, storage, transport and display. If the total time is:

- Less than 2 hours, the food can be used or put back in the refrigerator for later use,
- Between 2 and 4 hours, the food can still be used, but can't be put back in the refrigerator, and
- 4 hours or longer, the food must be thrown out.

Using the 2-hour / 4-hour rule correctly

If a food business decides to use the 2-hour / 4-hour rule, there are certain Food Standards Code requirements that must be met. The business must be able to demonstrate compliance with these requirements if asked by an authorised officer from the NSW Food Authority or a council Environmental Health Officer. To demonstrate the 2-hour / 4-hour rule is being applied correctly, food businesses must:

- Ensure the requirements for potentially hazardous food (PHF) and ingredients are followed during:
 - receipt
 - storage
 - preparation.
- Implement a documented system for:
 - monitoring the length of time food is displayed out of temperature control
 - ensuring the food is appropriately identified
 - ensuring food is disposed of appropriately after 4 hours.

The documented system can take the form of:

- A set of work instructions on how the 2-hour / 4-hour rule is applied by the business, OR
- Keeping records that demonstrate adherence to the time temperature.

If a food business decides to use the 2-hour / 4-hour rule for temperature control but are not able to satisfactorily demonstrate they are applying the 2-hour / 4-hour rule correctly, the business may be found to be in breach of the Food Standards Code, which can lead to enforcement action.

It is the responsibility of food businesses to make sure all food handlers understand the use of the 2-hour / 4-hour rule and complete the appropriate records.

More information

This information is a general summary and cannot cover all situations. Food businesses are required to comply with all of the provisions of the Food Standards Code and the *Food Act 2003* (NSW).

- Visit the NSW Food Authority website at www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au
- Contact the Helpline on 1300 552 406 or at food.contact@dpi.nsw.gov.au
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand. (2016) Appendix 2 - [*The use of time as a control for potentially hazardous food*](#). In Safe Food Australia - A guide to the Food Safety Standards

About the NSW Food Authority: The NSW Food Authority is the government organisation that helps ensure NSW food is safe and correctly labelled. It works with consumers, industry and other government organisations to minimise food poisoning by providing information about and regulating the safe production, storage, transport, promotion and preparation of food.

Note: This information is a general summary and cannot cover all situations. Food businesses are required to comply with all of the provisions of the Food Standards Code and the *Food Act 2003* (NSW).