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Cooling Foods Safely

Safe cooling is when heat is removed rapidly from the food item, preventing it from remaining in the danger zone. When foods are cooled slowly bacteria can grow and cause a foodborne illness.

Cooling hot foods
135F to 70F within 2 hours AND to 41F within a total of 6 hours

The first step of cooling (135 to 70F within 2 hours) is a critical part of the cooling process since that is an ideal temperature range for bacteria to grow. Proper cooling is achieved only when both steps are met.

Use the following methods when cooling foods:

- Place food in small containers. Recommend using containers that are less than 2" deep.
- Cool foods in a cooler that has good air circulation. Do not use a preparation cooler that is frequently opened and closed.
- Put the container on a shelf in the cooler that is not crowded with other food items. Ensure there is ample space above the container to allow proper air circulation.
- Leave the container uncovered. Wrapping or covering the food acts as a barrier that prevents the heat from escaping and the cold air contacting the food.
- Stir or rotate the food during the cooling process. Continual stirring pushes the warm food in the center out.
- Place the container in an ice bath and continually stir. Or use ice as an ingredient to quick-chill the food.
- Use an ice wand to help cool food from the inside. Be aware that the ice inside will melt when being used to cool hot foods. Purchase more than one ice wand so the wand can be switched out when the ice melts.

Out of sight out of mind
Because cooling food is general an out of sight, out of mind process, using a temperature log will help keep employees and management aware that the food has cooled properly. When cooling take frequent temperatures to ensure rapid cooling is taking place. Also, incorporate cooling methods and temperature monitoring into recipes