

2-hour/4-hour rule for businesses

Temperature control is critical to prevent harmful bacteria from growing in food.

Food businesses need to minimise the time potentially hazardous food (PHF) is between 5°C and 60°C, known as the 'temperature danger zone', because food poisoning bacteria can grow rapidly in this range. Cold food should be kept at 5°C or below and hot food at 60°C or above.

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 for short, measured periods.

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

The 2-hour/4-hour rule outlines the time potentially hazardous food can be safely held between 5°C and 60°C.

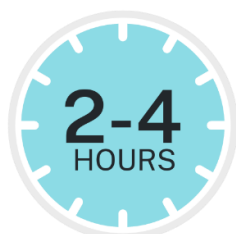
The rule was developed based on scientific studies.

If the total time between 5°C and 60°C is:

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



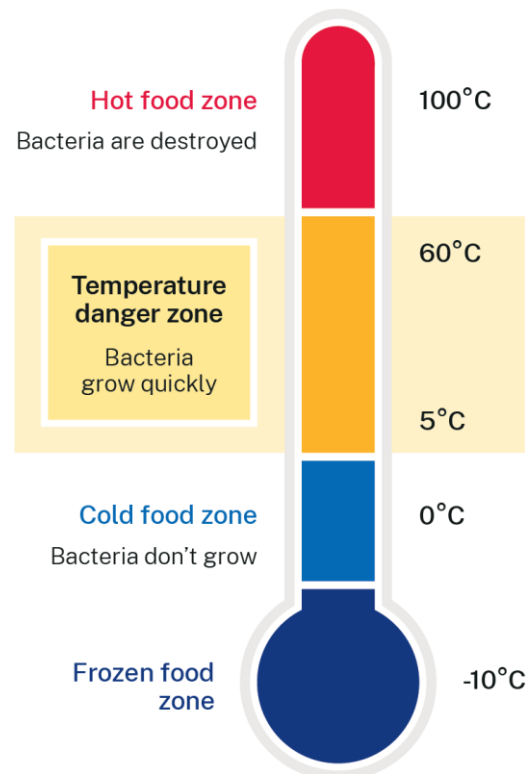
Okay to **use** or **refrigerate** at 5°C or less for later use.



Okay to **use** (can't be put back in the fridge).



Do not use. Must be thrown out.



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

Using the 2-hour/4-hour rule correctly

Businesses using the 2-hour/4-hour rule must meet certain requirements in the Food Standards Code and be able to demonstrate compliance to an authorised officer.

They must ensure the requirements for PHF and ingredients are followed during receipt, storage and preparation.

A documented system must be implemented for:

- monitoring the length of time food is displayed out of temperature control,
- ensuring the food is appropriately identified, and
- 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 uses the 2-hour/4-hour rule for temperature control but is unable to satisfactorily demonstrate they are applying it correctly, they 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 provisions of the Food Standards Code and the *Food Act 2003* (NSW).

Safe Food Australia - A guide to the Food Safety Standards: [Appendix 2: Time as a control for potentially hazardous food](#) (PDF, 479 KB).

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