

**HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY - COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ  
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES  
701 OCEAN ST., ROOM 312, SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060 (831) 454-2022**

**HOLDING TEMPERATURE FOR SAFE FOOD HANDLING**

**INTRODUCTION**

The failure to adequately control food temperatures is one of the factors most commonly involved in outbreaks of food borne illness. Since disease causing bacteria are able to multiply rapidly at temperatures between 41 °F and 140 °F, this is known as the Temperature Danger Zone.

**CORRECT HOLDING TEMPERATURE**

Control bacteria growth by keeping hot foods hot and cold foods cold.

- Hot foods must be kept at 140° F or above.
- Cold foods must be refrigerated at 41° F or below.
- Use a calibrated probe thermometer to check internal food temperatures.

**HOLDING HOT FOODS**

- Transfer hot foods directly to an oven, steam table, or other holding unit. Do **not** heat foods in a steam or hold unit.
- Reheat leftover foods to 165° F prior to placing in a holding unit. If possible, avoid cooking foods more than one day ahead of time.
- Stir foods at frequent intervals to evenly distribute heat.
- Keep a cover on foods to help maintain temperatures.
- Break the chain of possible contamination. **Never** combine an old batch of food with a new batch.
- Check the temperature of the foods on a frequent and regular basis. Use a clean and sanitized thermometer.
- Don't rely solely on the thermostat gauges of the holding equipment. They may not accurately indicate the internal temperature of the food.

**HOLDING COLD FOODS**

Here are some ways in which cold foods can be held safely:

- Keep foods in cold-holding tables, commercial refrigerated display cases, and refrigerators.
- Keep food in salad bars and display units, set the food containers in ice to keep them below 41° F.
- Keep a cover on foods held in cold holding units to help maintain temperatures.
- Check the temperature of the foods on a frequent and regular basis. Use a clean, sanitized thermometer.

**CALIBRATING A THERMOMETER USING THE ICE METHOD**

Immerse the temperature probe at least two inches into a glass of finely crushed ice. Add cold tap water to remove air pockets. Wait at least 30 seconds. The gauge should read 32° F; if not, adjust it accordingly.

For more information on food protection, please contact the Environmental Health Service (831) 454-2022.