Preparing & Holding Hot Foods Review

Preparing and Holding Hot Foods

1. There are certain categories of people that are at greater risk of contracting a foodborne illness. We call these groups the Highly Susceptible Population, or HSP. These groups include:

   - People with reduced immune systems (HIV, chemotherapy, etc.)
   - The elderly
   - Children
   - Women who are pregnant

2. These groups are more at risk for foodborne illness because their immune systems are too weak to fight off infection or sickness easily.

Temperature Abuse

1. The time and temperature abuse of food is a primary cause of foodborne illness breakout. In an earlier Unit we discussed the "temperature danger zone."  

2. The temperature danger zone ranges from 41°F (5°C) to 135°F (57°C), but you should keep in mind that microorganisms grow especially quickly between 70°F (21°C) and 125°F (52°C). Allowing foods to remain in this temperature danger zone is considered "temperature abuse."

Time Control

1. The longer a food is left in the temperature danger zone, the greater the risk of microorganism growth and contamination.

2. The magic number here is FOUR hours. If foods are allowed to remain in the temperature danger zone for more than four hours, you MUST discard the food.

Cross Contamination

1. Cross contamination occurs when two or more food items come into contact with each other, either directly or indirectly. Typical examples of cross contamination include:

   - Using the same knife to prepare shrimp and chicken (allergens from the shrimp can contaminate the chicken)
• Using tongs to serve a banana nut muffin, then using the same tongs to serve a blueberry muffin. (the nuts or crumbles from the first muffin may contaminate the second muffin)

• Cooking French fries in the same oil that was used to cook shrimp (the oil may transfer the shrimp allergen to the French fries during the cooking process)

2. There are a few steps that you can take to help prevent cross-contamination. These are:

• Always wash your hands and replace your gloves before preparing foods or when moving from one food to another

• Designate certain equipment and utensils as "allergen free zones" that will be used when preparing non-allergenic food items

• Make sure to thoroughly clean and sanitize all equipment, utensils, and food contact surfaces before and after preparing a food item

• If possible, store allergenic foods away from other foods

• Store fresh foods in clean and sanitized containers only

**Thawing Frozen Foods**

1. In order to prepare frozen foods for cooking, they must often be thawed.

2. Never thaw foods at room temperature because this might allow them to enter the temperature danger zone. Instead, you can choose to move the frozen foods into a refrigerator.

3. Potentially hazardous foods may be thawed under refrigeration, as long as the food is kept at a temperature less than 41°F (5°C)

4. You can also thaw in a microwave, as long as the food is transferred directly to conventional cooking equipment with no delay or interruption in the cooking process.

5. You can thaw certain foods through the process of any accepted cooking procedure if the food is prepared for immediate consumption and is cooked to its required minimum internal temperature.

6. You can also choose to thaw foods under running water, as long as:

   • the water temperature is 70°F (21°C) or below

   • the water runs fast enough to flush off any loose particles
• the thawed portions of ready-to-eat foods never exceed 41°F (5°C)

• the thawed portions of raw animal foods do not exceed 41°F (5°C) for more than 4 hours prior to cooking or storage under refrigeration

Preparing Hot Foods

1. Before you can begin cooking hot foods, you must prepare the various items involved.

2. In general, you should try to only remove as much product as you will need to prepare a recipe, and be sure to return any foods that are not used to refrigerators and freezers immediately.

3. Each food item should be prepared with a separate set of clean, sanitized equipment.

Cooking Hot Foods

1. Most bacteria cannot survive temperatures of extreme heat for any substantial amount of time, so one surefire way to maintain food safety is to cook hot foods until they are held at the required minimum internal temperature for a certain amount of time.

2. It is very important that all food establishment managers and employees be aware of the required minimum internal temperatures for each type of food.

Cooking Stuffed Meats

1. Stuffed meats also require extra care.

2. You will need to check the temperatures of both the meat and the stuffing to ensure that both have been kept at their required temperatures for the necessary amount of time.

3. If necessary, cook the stuffing separately from the meat to ensure both are safe to serve.

4. If you prepare items that include raw or previously cooked TCS food ingredients, make sure that each ingredient is cooked to its required minimum internal temperature for at least 15 seconds within two hours.
Cooling Hot Foods

1. In the process of cooling hot foods for storage, the food will obviously pass through the temperature danger zone as it cools down. Therefore, it is critical that the cooling process moves as quickly as possible.

2. The Food Code mandates that you must not take more than six hours to cool hot foods down to 41°F (5°C) or lower.

3. All fully cooked, TCS foods must be cooled from 135°F (57°C) to 70°F (21°F) within 2 hours and from 70°F (21°F) to 41°F (5°C) within 6 hours.

4. If you fail to bring hot food down to 70°F (21°F) within 2 hours, the food must either be thrown away or reheated to 135°F (57°C) before trying again.

5. Remember, even hot foods that are properly stored at 41°F (5°C) or below may only be kept for a maximum of 7 days before they must be discarded.

How to Cool Hot Foods

1. It is always a good idea to cut large portions into smaller sizes or transfer foods from large containers to smaller ones, which will help speed up the cooling process. Once you have done this, cool the food using one of the following options:
   - Foods can be divided into shallow pans, which decreases the amount of food that must be cooled and speeds up the process
   - Food containers can be placed into an ice-water bath, as long as the food is stirred frequently to speed up cooling
   - Foods that contain water as an ingredient can be prepared with less water, then cold water or ice can be added after cooking to cool the food down.

2. If you intend to prepare hot foods and then store them for an extended period of time, cooling methods will not be enough. You will need to freeze the foods and then re-thaw them according to the guidelines you have learned.

3. You may cover the cooling food loosely, but do not cover it tightly, as this can disrupt the cooling process.

Holding Hot Foods

1. The holding process offers more opportunities for bacteria to contaminate your food if you fail to manage the process properly.

2. All TCS foods must be held at or above 135°F (57°C) or at or below 41°F (5°C).
3. Therefore, you should frequently check the internal temperature of all foods that you are holding, at least every four hours.

4. If you ever discover that hot foods have been held at a temperature lower than 135°F (57°C) for four hours or more, you have to get rid of the food.

5. If the foods fall below this temperature for only an hour or two, you can remove the foods from holding and reheat them to their proper temperature before serving them again.

6. Before removing any hot foods from holding, make sure that the food currently has an internal temperature of 135°F (57°C) or higher. Otherwise, the time-temperature control process will not work properly.

7. If you remove foods from hot-holding that are cooler than 135°F (57°C), they may potentially be contaminated in less than four hours.

8. If you are delivering or catering hot foods, the temperature of the foods should never be allowed to fall below 135°F (57°C).

9. Label the food with the current time immediately upon removing it from holding, which will help other employees know when the food should be discarded.

10. When holding hot foods for self-service, you should make sure to maintain sanitary conditions for the food and any equipment being used in the holding process.

11. Containers should be cleaned after each use, and serving ladles should be left in the food item itself with the handle exposed for easy access by customers.

Re-heating Hot Foods

1. Even though you have already fully cooked the food once, the re-heating process still must be handled with care to prevent contamination.

2. Previously cooked, TCS foods should be reheated so that all parts of the food reach a temperature of at least 165°F (71°C) and are held at that temperature for at least 15 seconds.

3. If you use a microwave oven, make sure the food is covered while cooking, rotated or stirred for even distribution of the microwave’s heat throughout the food, and allowed to stand covered for two minutes after reheating.

4. Above all, you must keep in mind that the re-heating process should be a fast one. The total amount of time during which a food is between 41°F (5°C) and its required minimum internal temperature must be less than two hours.

5. If you take more than two hours to re-heat the food, it must be discarded.
6. When partially cooking food for future service, never cook the food for more than 60 minutes during the initial cooking process. Cool the food immediately after partially cooking it, then heat it back up to 165°F (71°C) before service.

7. When re-heating foods for holding areas like displays or self-service bars, make sure that the foods have fully reached their minimum internal temperatures before placing them in holding.

8. Never let your holding equipment finish the heating process for you, as this equipment is meant to keep already hot food hot, not to heat up cold food.