

2-HOUR/4-HOUR GUIDE

Food Act 2006
Food Safety Standards

The 2-hour/4-hour rule has been designed to help businesses deal with some of the practicalities of handling refrigerated, ready-to-eat, potentially hazardous food.

There may be circumstances where this type of food is brought out of refrigeration and held at temperatures above 5°C for convenience. For example, while preparing food at a kitchen bench or displaying food for service for short periods.

The rule provides options for what can be safely done with ready-to-eat potentially hazardous food brought out of refrigeration, depending on how long it has been at temperatures above 5°C.

HOW DOES THE 2-HOUR/4-HOUR RULE WORK IN PRACTICE?

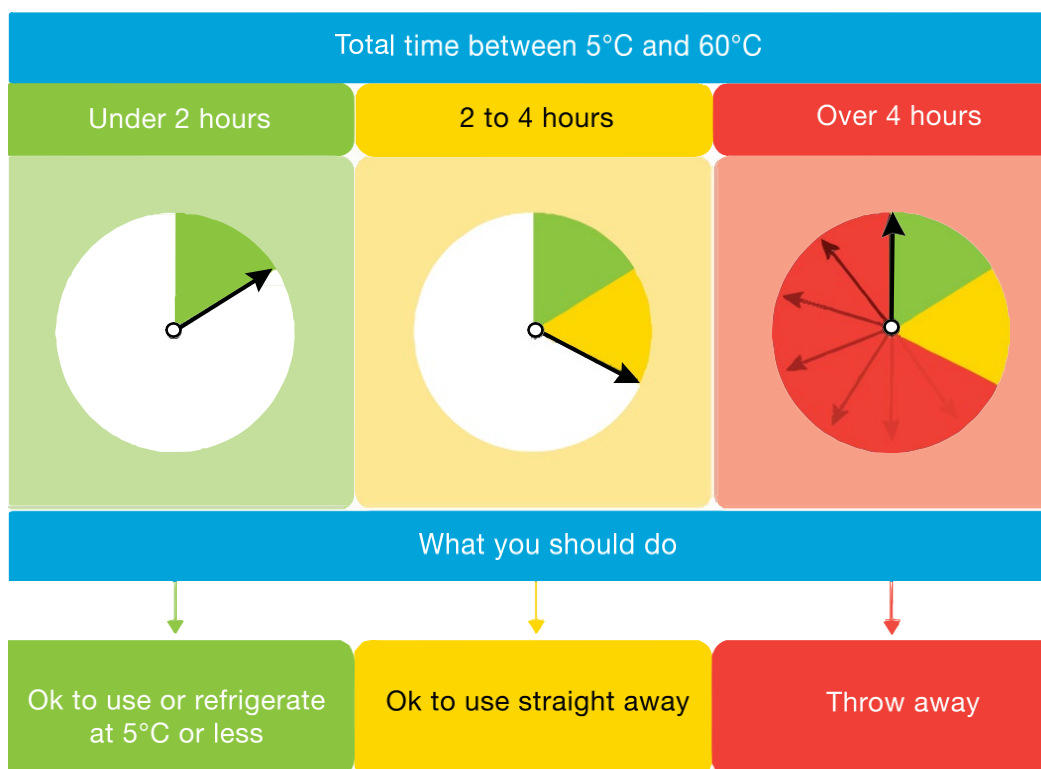
- » Timing should start from when the ready-to-eat potentially hazardous food is brought out of refrigeration (at 5°C or below).

- » If food is held for no more than 2 hours above 5°C, it can be put back in the refrigerator to use later.
- » Once the food is held for more than 2 hours above 5°C, it needs to be used, sold or discarded before the total time of 4 hours is exceeded.
- » Once food has been held for a total of 4 hours above 5°C, the time limit is exceeded, and it must be discarded.

WHEN EXTRA CAUTION IS NEEDED

Some foods should not be kept at higher ambient temperatures (e.g. >25°C) for more than 2 hours. For example, the Australian Egg Corporation Limited recommends that egg products that are to be held warm (e.g. foods with a hollandaise or béarnaise sauce) are prepared just before service and held only for that service period (generally up to 2 hours).

Extra caution is advised with foods served to vulnerable people (young, elderly, ill or pregnant).



(CC) BY-NC-ND Department for Health and Wellbeing (SA Health), Food Standards Australia & New Zealand

2-HOUR/4-HOUR GUIDE

Food Act 2006
Food Safety Standards

HOW CAN A BUSINESS KEEP TRACK OF THE TIME?

It is a good idea to keep records of the times that food is out of temperature control, and/or identify displayed food with time stickers or colour-coded plates, etc. These measures will help the business keep track of how long food has been held in the temperature danger zone, and to demonstrate the safety of their practice with potentially hazardous foods.

WHAT IF COOKED FOOD HAS BEEN COOLED – DOES THE COOLING TIME COUNT?

No, cooling is a separate process. The 2-hour/4-hour rule only applies to ready-to-eat potentially hazardous food once it has been removed from refrigeration.

WHAT IF THE FOOD HAS BEEN PREPARED BY ANOTHER BUSINESS?

The business wishing to use the 2-hour/4-hour rule will need to know the temperature history of the food to ensure its safety. For example, whether the food spent any time in the temperature danger zone during storage, preparation, or transport. If any of the available time has been 'used up' before the business receives the food, this time needs to be counted towards the total 4-hour period. If the business does not know this history, it should not make use of the 2-hour/4-hour rule and the food will need to be kept at or below 5°C or at or above 60°C.

CAN FOOD BE BROUGHT IN AND OUT OF TEMPERATURE CONTROL MORE THAN ONCE?

Yes, as long as the periods are for less than 2 hours each and the total time out of temperature control is no longer than 4 hours. The business should keep track of each time period the food is between 5°C and 60°C, so it knows when the total 4 hours is used up.

CAN A BUSINESS USE OTHER TIME PERIODS DIFFERENT TO THE 2-HOUR/4-HOUR RULE?

A business may use any temperature/time combination with any potentially hazardous food, if it can demonstrate the practice it uses is safe. The process must be according to documented, sound, scientific evidence and must not adversely affect the microbiological safety of the food.

MORE INFORMATION

If you require further information, visit Council's website townsville.qld.gov.au, or call Council's Customer Service Centre on 13 48 10.

EXAMPLE – LOG FOR 2-HOUR/4-HOUR RULE

| Food | Date | Time out of refrigeration (above 5°C) | Activity (e.g. sandwich prep, display, etc.) | Time back in temp control ($\leq 5^{\circ}\text{C}$) | Total time out | 2-hr/4-hr action • re-refrigerate • use • discard (see below) | Staff initials |
|------|------|---------------------------------------|--|--|----------------|---|----------------|
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | Total 4 hrs | Discard | |

© Food Standards Australia & New Zealand