



# TWO HOUR/ FOUR HOUR RULE

If you're a food business, you may use the 2-hour / 4-hour rule to keep food that's taken out of the fridge safe to eat.

## WHAT IS IT?

The time for which food can be safely held between 5°C and 60°C is known as the 2-hour/ 4-hour rule'. The 2-hour/4-hour rule is a good way to ensure potentially hazardous food is safe even if it's been out of refrigeration. The rule has been scientifically checked and is based on how quickly microorganisms grow in food at temperatures between 5°C and 60°C.

## HOW IT WORKS

- Food held between 5°C and 60°C for less than 2 hours can be used, sold or put back in the refrigerator to use later.
- Food held between 5°C and 60°C for 2-4 hours can still be used or sold, but can't be put back in the fridge.
- Food held between 5°C and 60°C for 4 hours or more must be thrown away.

**0 to 2 hours**  
Use immediately or  
refrigerate  $\leq 5^{\circ}\text{C}$  OR

**2 to 4 hours**  
Use immediately

**After 4 hours**  
Throw away

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

As long as you follow this, you can be confident the food is safe.

## NEED MORE INFORMATION?

Safe Food Australia is a guide to Chapter 3 of the Food Standards Code. Using time as a control is explained in Appendix 2. [www.foodstandards.gov.au/safefood](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/safefood)

Contact the City of Greater Geraldton Environmental Health team  
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# COOLING FOOD SAFELY

When cooling cooked potentially hazardous food, it must be cooled to 21°C in two hours or less, then cooled further from 21°C to 5°C in four hours or less.

## TIPS FOR COOLING FOOD QUICKLY

- Divide food into smaller portions in shallow containers to cool, being careful not to contaminate the food as you do this
- Use rapid-cooling equipment (e.g. a blast chiller)
- Stir liquid foods such as gravy often, using a clean and sanitised utensil
- Use water or ice water baths
- Allow air to flow freely around the cooling container (e.g. on a rack rather than the floor)
- Check temperature with a probe thermometer

  
Harmful microorganisms grow fastest between 21°C and 60°C

60°C

2 hours  
Cool food within 2 hours from 60°C to 21°C to minimise growth



21°C

4 hours  
The risk of growth slows as temperature decreases. Cool from 21°C to 5°C within 4 hours



5°C

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