

# Holding Temperatures 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 135° F, this is known as the temperature Danger Zone.

## Correct Holding Temperatures

Control bacteria growth by keeping hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Hot foods should be kept at 135° F (57.2° C) or above. Cold foods should be refrigerated at 41° F (5° C) or below.

## Holding Hot Foods

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

- Rapidly heat foods directly on a stove or in a microwave. Do not heat foods in a steam table, a crock pot, or a hot-holding unit.
- Transfer hot foods directly to an oven, steam table, or other approved hot-holding unit.
- Rapidly reheat leftover foods to 165° F prior to placing in 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.
- For salad bars and temporary display units, set the food containers in ice to keep them cold. The ice should be up the sides of the containers to the product level.
- 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.

## Thermometers

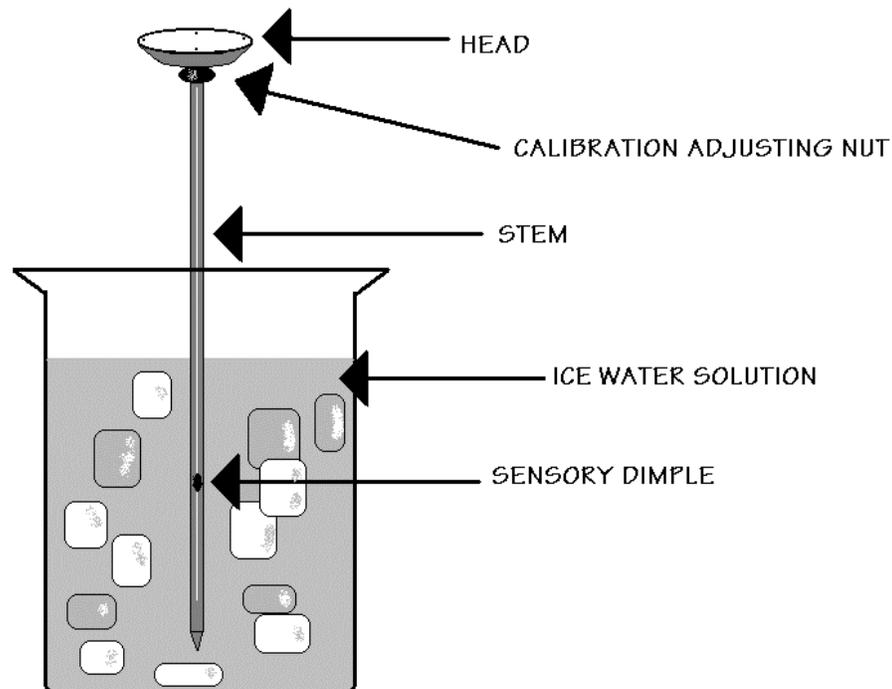
Each refrigerator is required to have a thermometer in an easy-to-read location and in the warmest part of the unit (e.g., by the door).

To monitor the internal holding (and cooking) temperatures of food, a probe thermometer is required. This is a thermometer that can be inserted into the food to check the internal temperature(s).

## Thermometer Calibration

It is important to make sure your probe thermometer is calibrated and your temperature readings are accurate. Check and recalibrate thermometers regularly because inaccurate readings could occur after an extreme temperature change, or if the unit has been dropped. To check the accuracy of your thermometer, or to recalibrate, follow the instructions below:

- Ice Water Method: Create a 50/50 ice and water slushy solution by filling a large cup (styrofoam is best) with finely crushed ice, add clean water to fill the glass, and stir well. Submerge thermometer stem (making sure the sensory dimple is immersed), and wait until the needle stops (about 3 minutes). The temperature should measure 32° F. IF NOT, without removing the stem from the cup, turn the calibration adjusting nut with a small wrench or other suitable tool, until the thermometer reads 32° F. [For a thermocouple or digital thermometer, try a new battery or have the manufacturer or a repair service check the unit].



- Boiling Point Method: Bring a deep pan of clean water to a full rolling boil. Submerge thermometer stem (making sure the sensory dimple is immersed), and wait until the needle stops (about 3 minutes). Thermometer should read 212° F. IF NOT, make necessary adjustments as described above.

## For More Information

For more information on food protection, please contact Environmental Health at (530) 621-5300 in Placerville or (530) 573-3450 in South Lake Tahoe.