



Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

Is It Safe to Eat: Food Temperatures for Child Care



Controlling temperatures is one of the most important ways to control the growth of bacteria in food. It also helps to reduce the risk of children and staff becoming sick with a foodborne illness. Therefore, it is vital to have the right thermometer(s), place them in the right locations, and use them properly to minimize the risk of a foodborne illness or outbreak in your child care setting. This mealtime memo will feature some basic tips for selecting and using food thermometers to prepare meals for the children in your care.

Select the best thermometer(s). Thermometers are designed for different uses and temperature ranges. For example, there are those that are specific for checking temperatures in the refrigerator/cooler, freezer, and storage areas. Additionally,

there are those specific for food, such as the bimetallic stemmed thermometer, oven-safe bimetallic thermometer, and the pop-up thermometer. Due to the various types, shopping can be a challenge; however, knowing the answers to the following questions can help you select the best thermometer(s) for your child care setting:

- How easy is the thermometer to use?
- How easy is it to calibrate?
- Will the thermometer require batteries? If so, what type of batteries and how often can you expect to replace them?
- Does the thermometer carry the NSF Mark? The NSF Mark indicates that the thermometer was manufactured following a recognized public health standard and that no materials were used in its manufacture that will be toxic when exposed to food.
- Is the probe receptacle easy to clean and sanitize?
- Is the temperature easily readable?
- Is it a one-time use temperature indicator?

Use them properly. As you prepare meals, measure the internal temperature of food by inserting the stem of the thermometer into the thickest part of the food, being sure to cover the sensor. Also, when inserting the stem, be careful not to touch fat, bone, gristle, or the cooking pan to reduce the risk of an incorrect reading. Then, wait for about 15 seconds or the recommended time provided by the manufacture for the dial or digital indicator to even out at the desired temperature. After the food has reached a safe internal temperature, clean and sanitize the thermometers before and after each use.

Avoid the temperature danger zone. Food left in the temperature danger zone (40 °F – 140 °F) for more than 4 hours can cause illness because of the increased speed of bacteria growth. For that reason, keep cold foods at 40 °F or below and hot foods at 140 °F or above. In addition, throw away any food left in the temperature danger zone for more than two hours.

In conclusion, properly using a thermometer is the best way to ensure foods are safe for everyone in your child care setting. Remember to check and change the battery in a digital thermometer on a regular basis. To learn about the temperature requirements for your state, check with your sponsoring organization, state agency, or local regulatory agency. For more information, regarding specific temperatures for different food types, check out the *Kitchen Companion: Your Safe Food Handbook* at http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/wcm/connect/2bc7ada9-12a4-4b36-960c-3230904edcc2/Kitchen_Companion.pdf?MOD=AJPERES.

References

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