



## Time as a Public Health Control

Time is usually used in combination with temperature to control bacterial growth in potentially hazardous foods and ensure safe food products. It is acceptable, however, under certain circumstances to remove foods from temperature control for short periods of time (less than four hours) and rely only on “time” as the public health control. When used correctly, time can be an effective control method because there will be no significant bacterial growth or toxin production possible in limited times. However, if time is not closely monitored, foodborne illness may result.

### Which foods can be used with “time only” as the public health control?

- A working supply of potentially hazardous food held before cooking.
- Ready-to-eat potentially hazardous food that is displayed or held for service for immediate consumption.

### What conditions must be met when using “time” as a public health control?

- The food establishment must provide written notification, if the regulatory authority requests it, of the establishment’s intention to use time as a public health control before putting this practice into place.
- The food container or package must be clearly marked to indicate the exact time that is four hours past the point in time when the food is removed from temperature control.
- The food must be cooked and served, served if ready-to-eat, or discarded, within four hours from the point in time when the food is removed from temperature control. Please note that once time is used as the control, food cannot be placed under temperature control again to be saved and used at a later time.
- All food in unmarked containers or packages and food in which the four-hour time limit has expired must be discarded.
- To ensure employees know how to properly use time as a public health control, written procedures must be maintained in the food establishment which details the following:
  - Marking food packages or containers with a time limit,
  - How to use time limits when cooking and serving foods, or serving ready-to-eat foods,
  - Discarding food that is unmarked or for which the time has expired, and
  - Properly cooling foods that have been prepared, cooked and refrigerated prior to using time as the public health control.

**These written procedures must be made available to the regulatory authority upon request.**