

Advice for the Home and Small Businesses on Cooling Hot Food

Hot food that is not intended for immediate consumption should be cooled as quickly as possible, because some food poisoning bacteria can survive conventional cooking and begin to grow if food is left at room temperature for more than a couple of hours. These bacteria can produce toxins when they grow, which are heat resistant, and will cause illness if eaten even if the food is thoroughly reheated.

To cool large pans of soup, stews and sauces quickly you should follow these simple steps:

- Take the pan off the heat and make sure it is covered with a lid or tin foil;
- Place the pan in a **clean** sink containing a few inches of cold water, (make sure the water does not splash into the contents of the pan);
- Leave the pan to cool for about 20 minutes, by which time the contents should be cool enough to portion, (if the cold water becomes warm it can be drained away and carefully replaced with fresh cold water, ice cubes can also be added to the water);
- Decant the contents of the pan into small clean storage containers, (e.g., food grade plastic) and cover with a lid, foil or cling film:
- Label with date and contents before freezing – the containers should be cool enough to freeze within 2 hours of cooking;
- For shepherds pies, lasagne or similar dishes you should avoid using large containers, which are slow to cool. Individual portions will cool more rapidly.

