

Date Marking

SEVEN DAY LIMIT FOR READY-TO-EAT FOOD

What to date mark

Date marking is marking food containers to show when time/temperature control for safety (TCS) food was prepared or opened, or when food must be used or discarded. Date mark food meeting **ALL** these criteria:

- Ready-to-eat TCS food
- Refrigerated
- Held in the establishment for longer than 24 hours

How to date mark

An effective date marking method can include using calendar dates, days of the week or color-coded marks. Employees must use and be able to explain the food establishment's method to the regulatory authority upon request.

Use an effective date marking method to clearly indicate the seven-day period. Your establishment's method can use either the start date or the end date.

Day one is:

- The day food is prepared (for food prepared in the food establishment)
- The day the original container is opened (for food prepared and packaged by a food processing plant)

Storing date marked food

You can keep ready-to-eat TCS food in the refrigerator for up to seven days. Freezing food stops the date marking clock but does not reset it. Always store date marked ready-to-eat TCS food at 41°F or below, including during thawing.

Disposing of date marked food

Serve, sell or discard all refrigerated ready-to-eat TCS food within seven days. Do not exceed the use-by date placed on the original container by a food manufacturer.

Exemptions

Certain products may be exempt from date marking because they are manufactured and packaged in a regulated food processing plant and meet other specific requirements. These products may include:

- Commercially prepared deli salads, such as ham salad, seafood salad, chicken salad, egg salad, pasta salad, potato salad and macaroni salad
- Certain hard cheeses, such as cheddar, gruyere, parmesan Reggiano and Romano
- Certain semi-soft cheeses, such as blue, edam, gorgonzola, gouda and Monterey jack
- Cultured dairy products, such as yogurt, sour cream and buttermilk
- Preserved fish products, such as pickled herring and dried or salted cod and certain other acidified fish products

- Shelf-stable, dry fermented sausages, such as pepperoni and Genoa salami
- Shelf-stable salt-cured products, such as prosciutto and Parma (ham)

Other ready-to-eat TCS food that does not require date marking includes:

- Shellstock
- Individual meal portions served or repackaged for sale from a bulk container upon a consumer's request

Frequently asked questions

What is "ready-to-eat?"

Ready-to-eat food is reasonably expected to be eaten in that form. The food is edible without washing, cooking or additional preparation.

If food from individually date marked containers is mixed, what date applies?

Use the date mark for the oldest food as the date mark for the combined food. This applies to both combining two containers of the same food and to preparing a separate food product using date marked food.

For example, on Tuesday, chicken is cooked, cooled and date marked. On Thursday, the chicken is combined with other ingredients to make chicken salad. The chicken salad container is date marked to show Tuesday as the date of preparation.

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