

Defrosting

Good Hygiene Practice
Guide No 8

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HACCP Chart Reference

Cooling & Re-heating / Personal Hygiene / Cross Contamination

Food Safety Hazards

Freezing food does not kill harmful bacteria but it does prevent growth and multiplication of bacteria. As the food begins to warm during thawing, bacteria will begin to multiply slowly.

All food must be completely defrosted prior to cooking or reheating, unless the manufacturer's instructions indicate the food is to be cooked from frozen. If the food is not thoroughly defrosted before cooking, heat will be used to thaw the food rather than cook it. There is a danger that a core temperature of +75°C will not be achieved.



Factors Affecting Defrosting Times

Defrosting times are faster if food is frozen in smaller portions. Large items, such as a whole joint of meat or whole chicken, can take days to defrost. This should be considered when freezing items and it may be beneficial to breakdown or spilt items before they are frozen.

Tight packaging, such as vacuum packaging or wrapping in food wrap, has little effect on thawing times.

Loose wrapping, which traps an insulating layer of air, increases thawing time.

Foil wrap can reduce heat radiation and extend thawing time.

Food thaws quicker at ambient temperature which, in a kitchen, may be as high as +25°C. However, bacteria are able to multiply more freely at ambient temperatures and they may reach unacceptable levels. Defrosting in a cool room where the temperature is +10°C to +15°C provides a balance speeding up the thawing process and controlling microbiological growth.

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Control Measures:

- Separate individual food items to speed up defrosting - the bigger the surface area in relation to the volume of the item, the faster it will defrost.
- Cook or serve food within its remaining shelf life.
- Do not refreeze any defrosted food items. This does not apply where raw product is frozen, is defrosted and then cooked.

1. Defrosting in the Fridge

- Ensure the fridge is operating between +1°C and +8°C (+1°C and +5°C in Ireland).
- Limit the weight of food to be defrosted to 2.5kg
- Separate out individual food items to aid the defrosting process
- Ensure all raw foods are placed at the bottom of the separated from ready to eat foods to avoid contamination.
- Place defrosting raw food items in a container or receptacle to ensure melt water does not cross contaminate other foods.
- Do not re-freeze any defrosted food items



2. Defrosting at Room Temperature

- **Not suitable** for 'high risk' foods which require no further processing - e.g. ready to eat.
- Where possible defrost food in a room where the temperature is between +10 to +15°C.
- Do not use running water to thaw food as this significantly increases the risk of cross-contamination.
- Ireland specific - Food cannot be thawed at room temperature



3. Defrosting in Microwave

- Only use a microwave to defrost food that you intend to serve or cook immediately.
- Do not use domestic microwave ovens to defrost food.
- Use suitable containers such as shallow lightweight ceramic or plastic dishes designed for microwave use.
- Arrange food evenly on the turntable or on a plate, thickest area to the outside.
- Use the Defrost setting to ensure that food is defrosted and not cooked. A higher power setting will cause uneven defrosting and damage the food
- Stir liquid foods and turn solid foods regularly to ensure they defrost evenly.



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Additional Guidance

1. Prevention of cross contamination
 - Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No: 4 - Cross Contamination** for guidance on how to minimise cross contamination risks
2. Shelf-life of defrosted foods
 - Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No: 5 - Food Labelling & Shelf Life** for further guidance on manufacturers food labelling / in unit food labelling / date codes & date code checks