

# 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 on “time only” as the public health control. Used correctly, time can be an effective control because there will be no significant bacterial growth or toxin production possible in such a limited time. 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 only” as the public health control?

- The food establishment must submit written notification to the regulatory authority of its intention to use time as a public health control prior to putting it into effect.
- 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 can not be placed under temperature control again to be saved and used at a later time.

- All food in unmarked containers or packages, or for which the four hour time limit has expired, must be discarded.
- To ensure that employees know how to properly use time as a control, written procedures must be maintained in the food establishment which detail 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.

For Further Information Contact the Following MDH District Offices

Bemidji	◆	(218) 308-2100
Duluth	◆	(218) 723-4642
Fergus Falls	◆	(218) 332-5150
Mankato	◆	(507) 344-2700
Marshall	◆	(507) 537-7151
Metro	◆	(651) 201-4500
Rochester	◆	(507) 206-2700
St. Cloud	◆	(320) 223-7300

To request this document in another format, call 651-201-4500 or TTY 651-201-5797.

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