



Food Code Implementation Guidance from the  
Washington State Department of Health  
Environmental Health Division  
Food Safety Program

# Time as a Control



**Food Code  
References:**  
3-501.19

## FOOD CODE REQUIREMENT

The Food Code allows the use of time only, rather than time in conjunction with temperature, as the public health control for certain foods.

## FOR WHAT FOODS CAN TIME AS A CONTROL BE USED?

- **Working supplies of PHF *before cooking*** such as raw hamburger patties or pizza ingredients; or
- **RTE PHF displayed or held for immediate consumption** such as catered service, food served from quick service establishments, individual samples, or food individually portioned and packaged for immediate consumption.

Facilities that serve a highly susceptible population may not use time as a control for raw eggs.

## CRITERIA FOR USING TIME AS A CONTROL

If time is used as the public health control, the following criteria *must be* met:

- The food must be marked or otherwise identified to indicate the time that is four hours past the time when the food is removed from temperature control;
- The food must be cooked and served, served if RTE, or discarded within the four hours; and
- Food that is unmarked, or marked to exceed a four hour limit, must be discarded.

**Written procedures** that ensure compliance with the time as a control provision must be prepared in advance and maintained in the food establishment. The written procedures must be available to the Regulatory Authority upon request and include cooling methods for food that is cooked and cooled prior to using time as a public health control.

## DO WRITTEN PROCEDURES NEED TO BE PRE-APPROVED BY THE REGULATORY AUTHORITY BEFORE TIME ONLY CAN BE USED AS A CONTROL?

Pre-approval of written procedures is not required by the Washington State Retail Food Code, although food establishments are encouraged to work with their regulatory authority to develop procedures that will meet the time as a control requirements.

## WHAT ARE ACCEPTABLE MEANS FOR IDENTIFYING FOOD FOR WHICH TIME AS A CONTROL IS BEING USED?

The key is to make sure food employees and regulators can easily and accurately identify the time that food has been out of temperature control. Acceptable methods include stickers, tape, and writing on paper liners. If food is not marked or labeled, the food must be discarded.

## WHAT IS MEANT BY “TEMPERATURE CONTROL?”

Food that is under temperature control must be at or below 41° F or at or above 140° F.

## IF A TEMPERATURE HOLDING UNIT MALFUNCTIONS AND FOOD CANNOT BE TEMPERATURE CONTROLLED, CAN TIME BE USED AS THE PUBLIC HEALTH CONTROL?

Time as a control is designed to be used under carefully controlled circumstances and with close monitoring. It is not meant as an emergency backup in case of equipment failures, improper design, or lack of maintenance.

NOTE: This fact sheet is a compilation of major food safety rules regarding the given topic and is not designed to replace reading the Food Code.

