

Food Safety Program

Date Marking Fact Sheet

Public Health Significance

The growth of pathogenic bacteria to dangerous levels can result when potentially hazardous foods are held at refrigerated temperatures for extended periods. To monitor and limit refrigeration time, refrigerated potentially hazardous, ready-to-eat food must be date marked to assure that the food is either consumed or discarded within seven days.

Definitions

Potentially hazardous: time/temperature controlled for safety foods.

Ready-to-eat: food that does not require any additional preparation, such as washing or cooking.

Date marking is only required when food is:

- Potentially hazardous;
- Ready-to-eat;
- Refrigerated (41°F or below); and
- held more than 24 hours.

How do I date mark required food items?

The date marking requirements listed above apply to containers of processed food from a manufacturer once they have been opened, as well as to food prepared by a food facility. The date marking requirements specify that containers be date marked with a “consume by” date (date of opening/preparation + six days) and if food is not consumed by that date – it must be discarded.

Ex: A food opened/prepared on April 2 would need to be marked with a “consume by” date of April 8 (date of opening/preparation + six days).

When combining foods in a dish marked with different “consume by” dates, the “consume by” date of the new dish should be the date of the earliest opened/prepared food.

What if I freeze the food?

Freezing food stops the date marking clock but does not reset it. If a food is refrigerated for two days and then frozen, it can still be refrigerated for five more days when it begins to thaw.

Date Marking Exemptions

1. Salad dressings and condiments packaged by the manufacturer: such as ketchup, mustard, relish, mayonnaise and salad dressings. Salad dressings/sauces prepared in the food facility must be date marked.
2. Deli salads packaged by the manufacturer: such as ham salad, seafood salad, chicken salad, egg salad, pasta salad and macaroni salad. Deli salads prepared in the food facility must be date marked.
3. Cultured dairy products: such as milk, creams, sour cream and yogurt.
4. Hard cheeses: such as cheddar, gruyere, parmesan, reggiano and romano.
5. Semi-soft cheeses: such as blue, edam, gorgonzola, gouda and monteray jack.
6. Uncut portions of shelf stable processed cured meats that are not labeled “keep refrigerated.”



Licking County Health Department

Contact Us

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about date marking in your facility!

740-349-6535

environmental@lickingcohealth.org