

Guidelines on Defrosting Food

Objective:

The guidelines aim to remind the food industry about the food hygiene and safety issues they should pay attention to during defrosting, as a means of reducing the risk of foodborne disease outbreaks and safeguarding food safety.

Scope of Applicability:

Establishments of food production and operation which need to defrost food in food handling process.

Points to Note when Defrosting Food:

- Plan ahead the amount of food needed to avoid defrosting excessive amount of food;
- Do not defrost food in hot water or under room temperature. Adopt proper ways to defrost food (see Safe Defrosting of Food);
- Do not refreeze thawed food;
- Thawed food or frozen food should be cooked thoroughly before consumption;
- Do not place food or food containers directly on the floor to prevent contamination of food;
- Discard immediately any food that is spoiled or with an abnormal smell.

Safe Defrosting of Food:

1. Defrost food in a refrigerator (below 5 °C) *
 - Transfer frozen food from freezer (-18 °C or below) to refrigerator about one day before food preparation;
 - Ideally, defrost food in a designated refrigerator, or follow the “cooked food above raw food” principle to place raw food under cooked food in the same refrigerator;
 - Non-packaged food should be wrapped with cling film or stored in lidded containers before putting it in refrigerator for thawing to prevent juices from contaminating other food items;

- Label the start time of thawing;
- If the thawed food is not for immediate consumption, it should be kept in a refrigerator and should be used or consumed within two days.

**Defrosting frozen food under refrigerated condition (below 5 °C) could avoid keeping it in the temperature danger zone, and hence defrosting food in a refrigerator is the best way to defrost food.*

2. Defrost food under running water

- Place the frozen food in a sealed package or plastic bag and put it in a clean sink or container. Then, defrost the food under running water or submerge it in cold water (changing water every 30 minutes). The defrosting process is best to complete within two hours;
- The defrosted food has to be used immediately. If it is not used immediately, it should be properly kept in a refrigerator and should be cooked on the day it is defrosted;
- Do not defrost food directly in water if it has not been properly sealed, and avoid contamination from juices dripping off the food or splashing onto food processing area, utensils or other food ingredients during defrosting.

3. Defrost food in a microwave oven

- Put the food in clean and microwave safe containers;
- When defrosting food in a microwave oven, the food should be taken out for stirring or turning over to facilitate even heating of food;
- When defrosting is completed, turn off the microwave oven and wait for a few seconds before taking the food out;
- The food should be cooked immediately after thawing in a microwave oven;
- Clean the microwave oven regularly to prevent contamination of food.

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