



Vegan Restaurants: Cooking & Holding Temperatures ... For Real

A couple of months ago, as I was teaching a private, on-site Food Manager Certification class at a vegan restaurant, I thought, 'It's too bad. These students have to learn much more than they'll ever need to use in a vegan facility, such as proper cooking temperatures for different animal proteins.'

But then I thought more and realized that they do have to abide by FDA Food Code recommendations to control time and temperature. Yes, there is no cooking temperature requirement for fruits, vegetables, beans, rice, or pasta. But there is if vegan restaurants are cooking vegetarian food with the intention to hot hold.

If restaurants do hot hold ...

... cooked vegetables, they have to cook their cauliflower, spinach, or other vegetables to at least a minimum temperature of 135°F — so that food in hot holding equipment stays hot enough to avoid the temperature danger zone (TDZ 41°F - 135°F). Should they put it in hot holding equipment at less than 135°F, the food will remain in the TDZ. Hot holding equipment is just that, "hot hold." It is not designed for raising the food temperature.

The food is no longer safe...

...to eat after four hours in the TDZ because the number of bacteria in the food will have multiplied to such a number to cause illness. For this reason, even when holding food on specially designed hot hold or cold hold equipment, food temperatures must be checked at least every four hours. If food should be in the TDZ at four hours, there is nothing you can do to fix the food. The only corrective action so no one gets ill is to discard it.

As an alternative...

...cooks have a window of opportunity to save the hot food, should it measure in the TDZ — if they check it at two hours or less and reheat the food properly to 165°F within two hours. If they do so, it's like a "reset button." The four hours allowed in the TDZ starts over. Magic! The reheating process to 165°F uses heat to kill enough bacteria that might have developed in that time the food was in the TDZ.

What to do if the "cold food" warms up...

...and measures in the TDZ at two hours? Is there a way to cool the food properly and quickly to get it out of the TDZ? Is there a "reset

button" as one has with reheating food? The answer is no. There is no "reset button" with cold food!!!! Re-cooling "cold food" that has risen into the TDZ does not destroy bacteria that might have multiplied. There is no "kill step." This is why with cold holding, time is used in combination with temperature to prevent foodborne illness and control bacterial growth or toxin production.

According to the FDA, it is possible to hold cold food without temperature control for up to six hours if you meet certain conditions:

- The food was held under refrigeration at 41°F or below before it was set out
- The food has been labeled with the time it was removed from refrigeration
- The food should not exceed 70°F during service
- The food should be served or thrown out within six hours

With cold holding food, this translates as follows: you must still, at the least, take a temperature check at four hours. If the food measures in the TDZ, but is below 70°F, you must discard the food no more than two hours later — which adds up to a total of six hours in the TDZ. The

thought process to be able to leave cold food an additional two hours in the TDZ (for a total of six hours in the TDZ) is that bacteria are slow to duplicate below 70°F. But if at four hours, the cold food measures above 70°F — you do have to throw it away, right then and there.

Whether you serve vegan or non-vegan, the FDA Food Code recommendations apply to all facilities to prevent foodborne illnesses and outbreaks due to biological, chemical, or physical contamination. And, of course, adhering to the four factors to prevent foodborne illness is critical no matter what kind of food is prepared: control time & temperature, avoiding cross contamination, practicing good personal hygiene, and proper cleaning and sanitizing.

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