‘Cook now, Eat later’ Guidance

To produce cooked chilled foods safely you need to concentrate on 4 things - cleaning, cooking, cooling and avoiding cross contamination, and label clearly.

Cleaning

- Ensure all your food contact surfaces are clean and sanitised before working.

Cooking

- Ensure your products are cooked to greater than 75°C (by you and by your customers if you are a business manufacturing chilled or cook-chilled food to be re-heated).

Cooling

- Cool products down after cooking to less than 8°C within 3 hours

Cross-contamination

- Ensure raw and cooked products do not mix
- Ensure allergens are kept separate
- Ensure that your hands are washed frequently
- Ensure you wear clothes and hair coverings to protect the food and food preparation areas.
- Ensure you use clean utensils and equipment and work in a clean, tidy food preparation area at all times

Cleaning

Wash hands frequently and after handling raw foods, going to the toilet, eating and drinking. It is good practice to wash your hands every time you enter or leave the preparation area.

Wash all surfaces and things that contact the food thoroughly to remove debris using detergent and then sanitise.

Cooking and Cooling

Food needs to be thoroughly cooked to make sure it is safe; as a rule of thumb foods should be cooked to 75 °C or above https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/sfbb-caterer-cooking-01-cooking-safely.pdf

Some foods require extra care to ensure they are safe when prepared – specifically eggs, rice, pulses and shellfish - https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/sfbb-caterer-cooking-02-foods-that-need-extra-care.pdf

Food cooked at your unit for delivery to customers should either be kept hot (63°C or above, https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/sfbb-caterer-cooking-06-hot-holding.pdf) from production to delivery, or cooled rapidly after cooking, for later chilled delivery or reheating before delivery (see below).

All cooked food must reach ambient temperatures in approximately 1 hour; you can use portioning to smaller quantities to achieve this. Then either use an ice bath (water and ice in a sink) to reduce further to 8°C or below then place in the fridge to reach 8°C or below within another hour, for safety. https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/sfbb-chilling-02-chilling-down-hot-food.pdf
Do not put hot food in the fridge; this will cause the fridge temperature to rise, causing other food to spoil or become unsafe.

Chilled foods should be kept chilled until it reaches the customer by using a chilled vehicle, insulated cooler boxes or bags with cooler blocks or gel bags inside, for delivery. Chilled foods must be discarded if they are above 8°C for more than four hours; delivery should
therefore, be well within this timescale.

Chilled foods reheated at your premises for onward delivery to customers should be reheated quickly to at least 75°C, then hot held at 63°C or above until delivery to the customer, or delivered within an hour, if the hot hold cannot be maintained.

Cross-Contamination
All steps of preparation and cooking must ensure you do not allow raw and cooked foods to mix. Be careful to ensure you do not put cooked food on surfaces that have had raw food on. Also make sure you are not mixing foods with allergens with those that do not have that allergen in.

All foods must be in separate sealed containers to avoid the risk of cross-contamination; it is important that allergens do not transfer from one product to another.

Labelling
Chilled products should be packed in containers that are labelled with their name, the date the product should be used by and an ingredients list (a simple list in descending order) that highlights any allergens present, even if from a processing aid.

In the EU and UK allergy legislation, the allergens that must be highlighted are:

- cereals containing gluten (e.g. wheat, rye, barley and oats) and products thereof
- crustaceans (e.g. prawns, crabs, lobster, crayfish) and products thereof
- eggs and products thereof
- fish and products thereof
- peanuts and products thereof
- tree nuts (specifically almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, cashews, pecans, Brazils, pistachios, macadamia/Queensland nuts) and products thereof
- soya / soybeans and products thereof
- milk and products thereof (including lactose)
- celery and celeriac and products thereof
- mustard and products thereof
- sesame and products thereof
- lupin and products thereof
- molluscs (e.g. clams, mussels, oysters, whelks, snails and squid) and products thereof
- sulphur dioxide/sulphites where added above 10 mg/kg (might be in dried fruit, for example)

Be clear about the date the product should be used by. Keep the shelf life to no more than 3 days and explain how you want the user to store the product. Giving more than 3 days life could allow food poisoning bacteria to grow - even in a fridge.

You should give instructions to the customer of how to store the food safely and how to cook or re-heat the food to ensure it goes above 75°C.

Storing Food Safely
Cooked food to be kept chilled should be cooled quickly at room temperature and then placed in the fridge within one to two hours. Chilled food should then be kept at less than 8°C. The coldest part of the refrigerator should be below 5°C and the fridge should not be over-filled. Chilled food should be kept out of the fridge for the shortest time possible.

Food for freezing should be frozen immediately, not be left to the end of the chilled shelf life (3-4 days) before freezing, to avoid product deterioration and potential spoilage or food safety issues during thawing.

If consumers cannot eat hot food products immediately, they should ensure that it is cooled to room temperature before refrigeration, (as described above under ‘cooking and cooling’), then refrigerated

to reach 8°C or less, before then placing into the freezer. Placing hot or warm food into the freezer may cause the freezer temperature to rise, unless the consumer's freezer has a fast freeze compartment.

Frozen foods for reheating should either be thawed in the fridge, or defrosted using the defrost setting in a microwave, before cooking, or cooked from frozen, if the microwave cooking instructions give a suitable method.

Using a Microwave

Producers using a microwave to re-heat a chilled product should ensure that the food is hot before delivery/serving. They should follow their microwave oven instructions on re-heating, because the re-heat time will depend upon the power (wattage) of the microwave, and the power level selected.

Consumers using a microwave to re-heat a chilled product should ensure that the food is hot before delivery/serving. They should follow their microwave oven instructions on re-heating, because the re-heat time will depend upon the power (wattage) of the microwave, and the power level selected. The producer should therefore ensure that simple advice regarding reheating is given to the consumer.

It is very important to follow re-heat instructions carefully; for example, if stirring part way through cooking, or giving the food a standing time after reheating, because the standing time can be a part of the cooking process