

ServSafe Temperature & Time Chart

Every number the ServSafe Manager exam tests, on one sheet · foodsafeprep.com

The danger zone: 41°F to 135°F

Bacteria multiply fastest in this range. The whole exam is essentially a set of rules for keeping TCS food out of it, or limiting how long food spends inside it.

Receiving

Reject it rather than argue about it.

Cold TCS food	41°F (5°C) or lower
Milk	45°F (7°C) or lower, then cooled to 41°F within 4 hours
Shell eggs	45°F (7°C) or lower
Live shellstock	45°F (7°C) or lower, air temperature 45°F
Frozen food	Frozen solid, no evidence of thawing and refreezing
Shellstock tags	Keep for 90 days from the date the last shellstock is sold

Storage

Cold holding is a rule, not a practice.

Cold TCS food	41°F (5°C) or lower
Date marking (ready-to-eat TCS)	7 days at 41°F or lower, counting the prep day as day 1
Off the floor / off the wall	6 inches (15 cm) off the floor, 4 inches (10 cm) from the wall
Fridge order, top to bottom	Ready-to-eat · seafood · whole cuts of beef and pork · ground meat · poultry

Cooking

Hold each temperature for the full time, at the thickest part.

165°F (74°C) for 15 seconds	Poultry, stuffing, stuffed meat, dishes with previously cooked TCS food, reheated leftovers
155°F (68°C) for 17 seconds	Ground meat, ground fish, ratites, and eggs held for service
145°F (63°C) for 15 seconds	Seafood, whole cuts of beef and pork, eggs cooked to order
135°F (57°C) for 15 seconds	Plant food cooked for hot holding, and commercially processed ready-to-eat food

Cooling

Two windows. Miss the first one and you start over.

135°F → 70°F	Within 2 hours
70°F → 41°F	Within the next 4 hours
Total	6 hours, and never at room temperature
If 70°F is missed	Reheat to 165°F for 15 seconds within 2 hours, then cool again
Methods that work	Shallow pans, ice-water bath, ice paddle, blast chiller, smaller portions

Reheating and holding

Reheating is not the same as hot holding.

Reheating for hot holding	165°F (74°C) for 15 seconds, within 2 hours
Hot holding	135°F (57°C) or higher
Cold holding	41°F (5°C) or lower
Checking frequency	Every 4 hours — every 2 hours if you want time to fix it instead of discarding
Food left out	The 4-hour rule: discard after 4 hours in the danger zone

Cleaning, sanitising and hands

Concentration and contact time both matter.

Chlorine sanitizer	50–100 ppm, water at 75°F or warmer, at least 7 seconds contact
Iodine sanitizer	12.5–25 ppm, water at least 68°F, at least 30 seconds contact
Quats	Follow the manufacturer's concentration, 75°F or warmer, at least 30 seconds
Handwashing	Water at least 100°F, soap, scrub 10–15 seconds, 20 seconds total
Manual dishwashing	Wash at least 110°F, then rinse, then sanitise
Three-compartment order	Wash → rinse → sanitise → air dry

The four numbers people actually lose marks on

- **41°F** — the cold side of the danger zone, and the number the exam repeats most.
- **135°F** — the hot side, and the hot-holding minimum.
- **165°F** — cooking for poultry and stuffing, and the reheating number.
- **2 hours, then 4 hours** — the two cooling windows. Together, six.

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