West Central Minnesota Communities Action
HEAD START

FOOD TEMPERATURE GUIDE

A quick guide for onsite, delivered and transported meals

TCS means Time/Temperature Control for Safety. These foods can support rapid pathogen growth when held at unsafe temperatures. Temp each TCS food accurately at the required control point and record the actual °F to verify it is safe before service. After a safe check, verified active hot/cold holding prevents an unnecessary second food temperature.

HOT HOLDING

135°F+

Keep hot TCS food at or above 135°F.

COLD HOLDING

41°F or below

Includes stored milk. Bulk milk receipt: 45°F or below, then refrigerate.

TEMP THESE TCS FOODS

- Meat, poultry, fish, eggs and combination entrees.
- Cooked rice, pasta, beans, vegetables, soups and casseroles.
- Milk, yogurt and other refrigerated TCS food when received, prepared, or cold holding is uncertain.
- Cut melon, cut leafy greens, cut tomatoes and cold prepared salads.

Rule of thumb: If it must stay hot or cold to remain safe, temp it.

NON-TCS FOODS - NO TEMP REQUIRED

- Bread, buns, tortillas, cereal, crackers and chips.
- Whole apples, oranges, bananas and grapes.
- Unopened shelf-stable fruit cups, applesauce, canned fruit and packaged snacks.

Remember: No food temperature is required, but follow product labels and site procedures for safe storage and handling.

WHEN TO TAKE A TEMPERATURE

Prepared onsite

- Check final cooking temperatures: poultry 165°F; hamburgers/ground meat 155°F; fish, whole raw meat and eggs 145°F.
- Hot TCS food: temp after cooking/reheating. Reheated leftovers or previously cooked-and-cooled TCS food must reach 165°F for 15 seconds before hot holding.
- Stored milk and other cold TCS food: use the daily refrigerator/cooler log at 41°F or below. No meal-by-meal food temp is required while holding is verified; temp only if the unit is out of range or safety is uncertain.

Delivered or transported

- Immediately upon receipt/after transport: temp each hot and cold TCS menu item. An equipment display does not replace this arrival food temperature.
- If the arrival temperature is safe, move hot food to a preheated warming unit at 135°F or above and cold food to refrigeration at 41°F or below. No second food temp is needed while active holding is verified.
- Milk received in bulk: temp once at receipt at 45°F or below, then manage it through the daily refrigerator/milk-cooler log.

HOW TO TEMP AND RECORD

- Wash hands. Clean and sanitize the probe before and after each food.
- Place the probe in the thickest or coldest center; avoid touching the pan or container.
- For multiple pans/containers, check each one. Record the lowest hot or highest cold reading; note extra readings if needed.
- Wait for a stable reading, record the actual °F, and write any corrective action taken.

IF TEMP IS NOT IN RANGE

- Contact the vendor and supervisor/CACFP administrator, record the initial temperature, and keep the food out of service while it is corrected.
- Hot food below 135°F: a warmer is for holding, not reheating. If authorized and safe time is confirmed, microwave rapidly to 165°F; stir/rotate, cover, stand covered 2 minutes, record the corrected temperature, then hot hold.
- Cold food above 41°F: if authorized and safe time is confirmed, refrigerate immediately and recheck before service. Discard/use a backup when time is unknown, correction fails, or danger-zone time exceeds 4 hours.

Basis: MDE CACFP Food Service Operations; Minnesota Food Code 4626.0360 and 4626.0395; ICN CACFP Food Safety Toolkit. Last reviewed August 2026. Follow the site SOP and local health authority if they are more restrictive.