

SOP Template: Guidelines for Food Preparation and Cooling Times

This SOP provides detailed **guidelines for food preparation and cooling times** to ensure food safety and prevent microbial growth. It covers proper cooking temperatures, time limits for cooling cooked foods, best practices for rapid cooling, and storage requirements. Adherence to these guidelines helps maintain food quality, reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses, and comply with health regulations.

1. Purpose

To establish safe procedures for preparing, cooking, cooling, and storing food to prevent microbial contamination and ensure food safety.

2. Scope

This SOP applies to all staff involved in food preparation, cooking, cooling, and storage in the facility.

3. Responsibilities

- Food handlers must follow food preparation and cooling guidelines.
- Supervisors should monitor adherence to this procedure.

4. Food Preparation and Cooking Guidelines

Food Item	Minimum Internal Cooking Temperature	Holding Time
Poultry (whole or ground)	165°F (74°C)	15 seconds
Ground Meat (beef, pork, lamb)	155°F (68°C)	15 seconds
Seafood, Eggs	145°F (63°C)	15 seconds
Roasts	145°F (63°C)	4 minutes
Hot-held Food (ready to serve)	135°F (57°C)	Any duration while hot-held

5. Cooling Procedures & Time Limits

- Cool hot foods from **135°F (57°C) to 70°F (21°C)** within 2 hours.
- Cool further from **70°F (21°C) to 41°F (5°C) or below** within an additional 4 hours.
- Total cooling time must not exceed 6 hours.

6. Best Practices for Rapid Cooling

- Divide large portions of food into shallow containers (no more than 2 inches deep).
- Use ice baths or ice paddles to accelerate cooling.
- Stir food frequently to distribute cold temperatures evenly.
- Leave containers uncovered, if safe, during the cooling process.
- Use blast chillers when available.

7. Storage Requirements

- Once cooled to **41°F (5°C) or below**, cover and label food items with the date/time of preparation.

- Store cooled foods above raw foods to prevent cross-contamination.
- Consume or discard refrigerated leftovers within 7 days, or earlier if regulations require.

8. Monitoring and Documentation

- Use a calibrated food thermometer to verify internal temperatures.
- Record cooling times and temperatures on cooling logs.
- Supervisors to audit logs daily for compliance.

9. Corrective Actions

- If food does not meet cooling/time requirements, discard it or reheat and properly recool.
- Review procedures and retrain staff if violations occur.