



FlexiLearnHub

Knowledge Hub

Professional Resources for Care, Catering & Hospitality

FREE PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

Safe Defrosting of Food in Care Catering

A Practical Guide for Care Staff

Knowledge Hub Resource 081

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Introduction

Understanding Safe Defrosting in Care Catering

Frozen food can be a safe and practical part of care catering, but it must be **stored, defrosted, prepared and cooked correctly**.

When frozen food begins to thaw, the outside can reach a temperature at which bacteria are able to multiply while the centre remains partly or completely frozen. Poor defrosting practices can therefore increase the risk of **bacterial growth, cross-contamination and inadequate cooking**.

Safe defrosting starts with good planning.

Why Safe Defrosting Matters

Incorrect defrosting can create several food-safety problems.

These may include:

- Bacteria multiplying as food warms
- Raw meat or poultry juices contaminating other foods
- Food remaining frozen in the centre
- Uneven cooking
- Incorrect cooking times
- Food being left at room temperature for too long
- Staff being unable to establish how long food has been defrosting
- Defrosted food being stored for longer than appropriate

These risks are particularly important when catering for people who may be more vulnerable to foodborne illness.

Always Check the Manufacturer's Instructions

Before defrosting a frozen product, check the manufacturer's instructions.

Some foods should be:

- Defrosted completely before cooking
- Cooked directly from frozen
- Defrosted under refrigerated conditions

- Used within a specified period after defrosting
- Prepared using particular cooking instructions

Do not assume that every frozen product should be treated in the same way.

If the manufacturer states that a product can be **cooked safely from frozen**, follow the cooking instructions provided.

Plan Defrosting in Advance

One of the safest ways to manage defrosting is to include it within normal kitchen planning.

Staff should consider:

- What food will be required?
- How much needs to be defrosted?
- When will it be needed?
- How long is it likely to take?
- Where will it be defrosted?
- How will it be protected from contamination?
- When must it be ready for preparation or cooking?

Planning helps prevent staff resorting to unsafe shortcuts because food has not been taken out of frozen storage early enough.

Defrosting in the Refrigerator

Where appropriate for the food and consistent with manufacturer instructions, **defrosting under refrigeration is generally a safer method** because the food remains under controlled chilled conditions while it thaws.

Food should be:

- Placed in a suitable container
- Covered or appropriately wrapped
- Positioned to prevent contamination
- Kept separate from ready-to-eat foods where necessary
- Allowed sufficient time to defrost
- Clearly identifiable

Large or dense items may take considerably longer to defrost than smaller portions.

Prevent Raw Food From Contaminating Other Food

Raw meat, poultry and fish may release liquid while defrosting.

This liquid can contain harmful microorganisms.

Raw food should therefore be positioned and contained so that juices cannot:

- Drip onto ready-to-eat food
- Contaminate refrigerator shelves
- Leak onto other ingredients
- Contaminate food containers
- Spread onto handles or other surfaces

Suitable containers should be capable of containing any liquid produced during defrosting.

Do Not Routinely Defrost Food at Room Temperature

Leaving potentially hazardous food on a worktop or elsewhere at room temperature can allow the outside of the food to warm while the centre is still frozen.

This can create conditions that allow bacteria to multiply.

Staff should use the organisation's approved defrosting method and follow manufacturer instructions rather than simply leaving frozen food in the kitchen until it feels thawed.

Check That Food Is Fully Defrosted Where Required

Where food needs to be completely defrosted before cooking, staff should check that it is **fully thawed throughout**.

Particular attention may be needed with:

- Whole poultry
- Large joints of meat
- Thick portions
- Large containers of frozen food
- Foods with dense centres

Ice crystals or a hard frozen centre can indicate that food has not completely defrosted.

Why Partial Defrosting Can Affect Cooking

If food that should have been fully defrosted remains frozen in the centre, normal cooking instructions may not heat it evenly.

The outside may appear cooked while the centre has not received sufficient heat.

This is why staff should not rely only on the appearance of the outside of the food.

Correct defrosting and correct cooking are **separate but connected food-safety controls**.

Cooking From Frozen

Some commercially produced foods are specifically designed to be cooked directly from frozen.

Where this is the case:

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions
- Use the specified cooking method
- Follow the stated cooking time and temperature instructions
- Ensure the food is thoroughly cooked as required
- Follow workplace food-safety procedures

Do not partially defrost a product simply because this appears likely to make it cook more quickly unless this is consistent with the instructions and workplace procedure.

Microwave Defrosting

A microwave may be used for defrosting some foods where this is appropriate and permitted by workplace procedures.

However, microwave defrosting can begin to **warm or partially cook some areas while others remain cold or frozen**.

Where microwave defrosting is used:

- Follow equipment and food instructions
- Use an appropriate defrost setting
- Rotate or turn food where required
- Check for frozen areas
- Cook promptly after defrosting where required by the procedure

Microwave defrosting should not become a substitute for appropriate production planning.

Defrost Only What Is Needed

Good planning can reduce both food-safety risks and unnecessary waste.

Staff should avoid routinely defrosting excessive quantities “just in case”.

Consider:

Menu → Number of Portions → Existing Stock → Quantity Required → Safe Defrosting

This can reduce the amount of defrosted food that later needs to be discarded.

Labelling Defrosted Food

Where required by workplace procedures, defrosted food should be clearly identified.

Information may include:

- Product name
- Date removed from frozen storage
- Date or time defrosting began
- Date fully defrosted where relevant
- Date by which it must be used
- Staff identification where required

The appropriate information will depend on the product and the organisation's food-safety system.

Staff should never invent a defrosting date when the history of the food is unknown.

How Long Can Defrosted Food Be Kept?

There is **no single storage period that should automatically be applied to every type of defrosted food.**

Staff should follow:

- Manufacturer instructions
- Product-specific requirements
- Workplace food-safety procedures
- Applicable storage controls

Do not create an arbitrary number of days simply because food has been defrosted.

Refreezing Defrosted Food

Staff should not automatically refreeze food simply because it has not been used.

Whether food can safely be refrozen depends on factors including the **type of food, how it was defrosted, how it has subsequently been handled and manufacturer or workplace instructions.**

Follow the organisation's procedure rather than making an individual assumption.

When the Defrosting History Is Unknown

If staff discover food and cannot establish:

- When it was removed from the freezer
- How it was defrosted
- How long it has been out
- Whether it has previously been defrosted
- Whether appropriate temperature control was maintained

they should **not invent the missing history.**

The food should be withheld from use and managed according to workplace procedures.

Good Practice Reminder

Safe defrosting should be planned, controlled and verifiable. If food should be fully defrosted before cooking, allow enough time to do it safely rather than relying on last-minute shortcuts.

Plan → Defrost Safely → Protect → Check → Cook Appropriately → Record Where Required

Practical Defrosting Procedures, Storage & Cross-Contamination Controls

Before Removing Food From the Freezer

Before starting the defrosting process, staff should check:

- The correct product has been selected
- The packaging is intact
- The food is within its appropriate date
- The quantity required has been calculated
- Manufacturer's defrosting instructions are available
- Suitable refrigerated space is available where required
- There is sufficient time for safe defrosting
- A suitable container is available to contain any liquid

Do not remove food from frozen storage without first considering **how and where it will be safely defrosted**.

Check the Product Instructions

Different products may require different defrosting methods.

The packaging may state:

- Defrost thoroughly before cooking
- Cook from frozen
- Defrost under refrigerated conditions
- Defrost for a specified period
- Use within a specified period after defrosting
- Do not refreeze once defrosted

These instructions should be followed alongside the organisation's food-safety procedures.

Defrosting Under Refrigeration

Where refrigerated defrosting is appropriate, food should be placed in a suitable refrigerator with enough time to thaw safely.

Staff should:

- Keep the food covered or appropriately wrapped
- Place it in a suitable container
- Prevent liquid from escaping
- Keep raw foods appropriately separated
- Avoid placing raw food above ready-to-eat food
- Maintain appropriate refrigerator temperature control
- Keep the product identifiable
- Check its progress where necessary

The food should not be placed somewhere simply because there happens to be available space.

Position Raw Food Carefully

Raw meat, poultry and fish require particular attention because liquid released during defrosting can contaminate other foods.

Raw products should be stored so that juices cannot drip onto:

- Cooked food
- Ready-to-eat food
- Desserts
- Salads
- Prepared vegetables
- Dairy products
- Other food containers

A suitable tray or container should be used to catch liquid.

Avoid Overloading Refrigerators

Large quantities of frozen food placed into a refrigerator at once can affect available space and potentially interfere with normal chilled-storage arrangements.

When planning defrosting, consider:

- Refrigerator capacity
- Air circulation
- Separation requirements
- Quantity being defrosted
- Other food requiring chilled storage
- Meal-production requirements

If large quantities need defrosting, this should be **planned rather than improvised**.

Keep Defrosting Food Identifiable

Food should remain clearly identifiable throughout the defrosting process.

Where required by workplace procedures, staff may need to record information such as:

- Product name
- Date removed from frozen storage
- Date/time defrosting started
- Intended use
- Required use or discard date
- Staff initials

Do not remove important manufacturer information before it is no longer required.

Checking Whether Food Has Defrosted

Where complete defrosting is required, staff should check the **thickest or most difficult-to-thaw areas**.

Possible signs that food is still partly frozen include:

- Ice crystals
- Hard frozen sections
- A frozen centre
- Frozen areas inside cavities
- Portions remaining stuck together because of ice

Large poultry and joints may require particular care because the surface can appear completely thawed while the centre remains frozen.

Poultry & Large Items

Where manufacturer instructions require complete defrosting, large items should be given sufficient time.

Staff should check areas such as:

- The thickest parts
- Internal cavities
- Around joints
- Areas close to bones

Never assume that an item is fully defrosted simply because the outside feels soft.

Handling Defrosting Liquid

Liquid from raw food should be treated as a potential contamination risk.

Staff should:

- Prevent leaks
- Clean spillages promptly
- Avoid touching other surfaces unnecessarily
- Wash hands appropriately after handling raw food
- Clean and disinfect contaminated food-contact areas according to procedure
- Avoid allowing contaminated cloths or equipment to spread microorganisms elsewhere

Cleaning should follow the organisation's established food-safety and infection-control procedures.

Separate Equipment Where Required

Equipment used with raw food can transfer contamination to ready-to-eat food.

Depending on workplace procedures, this may include:

- Trays
- Containers
- Chopping boards
- Knives
- Utensils

- Food probes
- Work surfaces

Suitable separation, cleaning and disinfection controls should be followed.

Hand Hygiene

Hands can transfer contamination from raw defrosting food to other areas of the kitchen.

Staff should perform appropriate hand hygiene after handling raw foods and before moving to tasks involving ready-to-eat foods.

Gloves, where used, **do not replace effective hand hygiene**.

Contaminated gloves should not be worn while touching refrigerator handles, cupboards or clean equipment.

What If Food Is Not Defrosted in Time?

A common operational problem occurs when food needed for a meal remains partly frozen.

Staff should not use unsafe shortcuts simply because service time is approaching.

Do not automatically:

- Place food in warm water
- Leave it on a worktop
- Put it near a heat source
- Begin cooking food that should first be completely defrosted
- Guess how much extra cooking time will compensate

Instead:

Stop → Check Instructions → Inform the Responsible Person → Use an Approved Alternative

This may mean changing the production plan or using another suitable ingredient.

Defrosting Using Cold Water

Some food may have manufacturer instructions or an established procedure allowing defrosting using cold water.

Where this method is permitted, staff should follow the **specific approved procedure**, including controls for packaging, water conditions, time and subsequent preparation.

Do not create an informal water-defrosting method because refrigerated defrosting was not planned early enough.

Microwave Defrosting

Where microwave defrosting is approved:

- Use appropriate microwave-safe containers
- Follow the equipment instructions
- Follow product instructions
- Use the appropriate defrost setting
- Turn, separate or rotate food where required
- Check for remaining frozen sections
- Be aware that some areas may begin cooking
- Proceed promptly to cooking where required

Microwave-defrosted food should not simply be left standing for an extended period after thawing.

After Defrosting

Once food has been fully defrosted, staff should:

- Keep it appropriately chilled where required
- Maintain protection from contamination
- Follow manufacturer instructions
- Observe the applicable use period
- Keep the product clearly identified
- Cook or prepare it according to procedure
- Maintain allergen and traceability information where necessary

Defrosting does not remove the need for normal food-storage controls.

Avoid Repeated Temperature Changes

Food should not repeatedly move between frozen, chilled and room-temperature conditions without appropriate control.

For example:

Freezer → Worktop → Refrigerator → Worktop → Refrigerator

can make the food's temperature history difficult to manage and increase unnecessary exposure to warmer conditions.

Good planning keeps the process simple and controlled.

Defrosting & Allergens

Frozen foods may contain allergens just like chilled or ambient products.

Staff should retain reliable information about:

- Product identity
- Ingredients
- Allergens
- Manufacturer instructions
- Relevant batch information

Never identify a defrosted product solely by appearance.

This is particularly important where similar products are prepared for residents with different dietary requirements.

Defrosting Texture-Modified Food

Where frozen texture-modified foods or prepared meals are used for individuals with dysphagia, staff should follow the relevant product and workplace instructions carefully.

After defrosting and preparation, the food must still meet the **prescribed texture requirements for the individual**.

Defrosting must not result in changes that make the food unsuitable for the required texture level.

Cleaning After Defrosting

Once raw food has been removed from the defrosting area:

- Dispose of packaging appropriately
- Deal with raw-food liquid safely
- Clean affected surfaces
- Disinfect where required
- Clean equipment appropriately
- Perform hand hygiene
- Return the area to a safe condition before other food preparation begins

This helps break the route by which microorganisms could transfer from raw food to ready-to-eat food.

A Practical Defrosting Routine

A simple routine for catering teams is:

Plan → Check Instructions → Remove Required Quantity → Defrost Safely → Protect & Separate → Check Thoroughly → Store/Prepare Correctly → Cook Safely

Good Practice Reminder

If food has not defrosted as planned, change the production plan rather than compromising the food-safety procedure.

Plan → Defrost → Separate → Check → Protect → Prepare → Cook

Defrosting Problems, Corrective Action & Staff Responsibilities

Even with good planning, problems can occur during defrosting. Food may be removed from the freezer too late, labels may be missing, refrigeration equipment may fail or staff may discover food that has been left in unsuitable conditions.

In care catering, staff should **never guess whether food is safe** simply to avoid waste or keep meal service on schedule.

When something goes wrong, the priority should always be **food safety and the protection of residents**.

Food Has Not Fully Defrosted

If food that should be completely defrosted remains partly frozen when it is required for preparation or cooking, staff should not automatically continue as normal.

Examples include:

- Ice crystals remaining inside the food
- A hard or frozen centre
- Frozen areas around bones or joints
- Portions still frozen together
- A frozen cavity inside poultry
- Large containers remaining frozen internally

Staff should:

Stop → Check the Instructions → Inform the Responsible Person → Decide on Safe Corrective Action

Depending on the product and workplace procedure, this may mean allowing further safe defrosting time or using an alternative product.

Do not improvise unsafe shortcuts because meal service is approaching.

Food Accidentally Left at Room Temperature

If food that should have been defrosted under controlled conditions has accidentally been left on a worktop or elsewhere at room temperature, staff should not simply place it back into the refrigerator and assume the problem has been corrected.

Consider:

- What food is involved?
- How long has it been out?
- What temperature conditions has it experienced?
- Is the history reliable?
- What do the manufacturer and workplace procedures require?

If its safety cannot be established, **do not use it until appropriate action has been determined by the responsible person in accordance with the food-safety system.**

Unknown Defrosting History

Staff may occasionally discover food where the defrosting history cannot be established.

For example:

- No date or label is present
- Staff do not know when it left the freezer
- Nobody knows how it was defrosted
- It is unclear how long it has been chilled
- The product has been transferred into another container without sufficient information
- Staff cannot establish whether it has previously been frozen and thawed

Never invent the missing information.

Where the safety or traceability of food cannot be established, it should be **isolated from food intended for use and reported according to workplace procedures**.

Incorrect or Missing Labels

A missing label can create uncertainty about both safety and traceability.

Do not solve the problem by simply applying a new label with an estimated date.

Staff should:

- Separate the food from usable stock
- Check whether reliable records exist
- Check original packaging where available
- Inform the appropriate person
- Follow the organisation's procedure
- Dispose of the food where its safe status cannot be established

A label is only useful when the information on it is accurate.

Refrigerator Failure During Defrosting

If a refrigerator used for defrosting fails or is found outside its required operating conditions, the food inside may need assessment.

Staff should:

- Keep the refrigerator closed where appropriate
- Report the equipment problem promptly
- Check available temperature information
- Establish how long the problem may have existed
- Identify affected food
- Move food only where this can be done safely
- Follow the organisation's equipment-failure procedure
- Record the incident and corrective action where required

Do not automatically assume that all food is safe simply because it still feels cold.

Freezer Failure & Partially Thawed Food

A freezer breakdown may result in food beginning to thaw unexpectedly.

Staff should not automatically refreeze affected food.

The appropriate action depends on factors including:

- The condition of the food
- Available temperature information
- How long the failure has occurred
- Whether food remains frozen
- Manufacturer instructions
- Workplace procedures

Affected stock should be identified and managed under the organisation's food-safety arrangements.

Packaging Has Leaked During Defrosting

Raw meat, poultry or fish can release contaminated liquid during defrosting.

If leakage occurs:

- Isolate the affected area
- Prevent staff from spreading contamination
- Remove affected food appropriately
- Check whether other foods or packaging have been contaminated
- Clean affected surfaces
- Disinfect where required
- Clean equipment appropriately
- Perform effective hand hygiene
- Report significant contamination where required

Ready-to-eat food contaminated by raw-food juices should not simply be wiped clean and returned to use.

Cross-Contamination Has Occurred

Possible cross-contamination should be treated seriously.

Examples include raw-food liquid dripping onto:

- Ready-to-eat food
- Cooked food
- Desserts
- Salads
- Prepared ingredients
- Clean equipment
- Food-contact surfaces

Staff should stop using affected items until the situation has been assessed and appropriate corrective action taken.

The priority is to **remove the contamination risk rather than preserve food that may no longer be safe.**

Food Has an Unusual Appearance or Odour

If defrosted food appears abnormal, damaged or spoiled, staff should not use it simply because it is within a labelled date.

However, it is equally important to remember that **food cannot be confirmed as safe by appearance or smell alone.**

Food may contain harmful microorganisms without obvious changes in:

- Appearance
- Smell
- Texture
- Taste

Never taste questionable food to determine whether it is safe.

Defrosting Has Taken Longer Than Expected

Large or densely packed foods may take longer to defrost than anticipated.

If this happens:

- Keep the food under appropriate controlled conditions
- Check the manufacturer's instructions
- Allow additional safe defrosting time where appropriate
- Reassess the meal-production plan
- Use an alternative product if necessary
- Inform relevant staff about changes

Do not move food into unsafe conditions simply to accelerate the process.

Food Was Defrosted but Is No Longer Needed

Sometimes meal numbers change or food is defrosted unnecessarily.

Staff should not automatically:

- Leave it for an indefinite period
- Change the label to extend its life
- Refreeze it without checking the applicable instructions
- Incorporate it into another dish simply to avoid waste

Follow manufacturer instructions and workplace procedures to determine whether the food can still be used safely.

Preventing food waste is important, but it must never override food safety.

Do Not Alter Dates to Avoid Waste

Changing a date does not make food safer.

Staff must never alter or replace a date simply because:

- Too much food has been defrosted
- A meal has been cancelled
- Stock has been forgotten
- The kitchen is trying to reduce waste
- A product has not been used as planned

Records and labels should accurately reflect what happened.

Allergen & Product Identification Problems

If a frozen or defrosted product cannot be reliably identified, staff may also lose essential allergen information.

Never guess:

- What the product contains
- Which allergens are present
- Whether it is suitable for a particular resident
- Whether two visually similar products are the same

If reliable allergen information cannot be established, the food should not be served to someone on the assumption that it is safe for them.

Staff Responsibilities

Catering staff should:

- Follow agreed defrosting procedures
- Check manufacturer instructions
- Plan defrosting sufficiently in advance
- Maintain separation between raw and ready-to-eat foods
- Use appropriate containers
- Label food accurately where required
- Check food is fully defrosted where necessary
- Report problems promptly
- Record information accurately
- Never invent missing dates, times or temperatures
- Never use unsafe shortcuts to meet service deadlines

Staff should work within their **training, responsibilities and organisational procedures**.

Manager & Supervisor Responsibilities

Managers and supervisors should help ensure that:

- Appropriate defrosting procedures are documented
- Staff understand those procedures
- Refrigeration capacity is adequate
- Suitable containers and equipment are available
- Defrosting is considered during menu and production planning
- Records are completed where required
- Problems are investigated
- Corrective action is taken
- Repeated problems lead to review and improvement

Repeated late defrosting may indicate a wider issue with **production planning, communication, stock control or staff training**.

Accurate Records

Where defrosting checks form part of the organisation's food-safety management system, records should be completed accurately.

Never:

- Guess a time
- Invent a temperature
- Backdate a check that was not completed
- Record that food was fully defrosted when it was not
- Sign for another person's check without authorisation

Records should reflect **what actually happened**.

Learning From Defrosting Problems

Corrective action should not only deal with the immediate food.

Managers should consider why the problem occurred.

For example:

Food repeatedly not ready for service

→ Review when food is removed from frozen storage.

Raw food repeatedly leaking during defrosting

→ Review containers, packaging and refrigerator positioning.

Missing labels

→ Review the kitchen's labelling procedure.

Too much food regularly defrosted

→ Review portion forecasting and production planning.

Staff using room-temperature shortcuts

→ Review training, supervision and available refrigeration capacity.

This turns individual incidents into opportunities to strengthen the overall food-safety system.

A Simple Corrective-Action Approach

When a defrosting problem is discovered:

STOP → SEPARATE → CHECK → REPORT → CORRECT → RECORD → REVIEW

STOP – Do not continue using questionable food.

SEPARATE – Prevent it contaminating or being confused with safe food.

CHECK – Establish what is known about the product and its history.

REPORT – Inform the appropriate person.

CORRECT – Follow the approved food-safety procedure.

RECORD – Document the problem and action where required.

REVIEW – Consider how recurrence can be prevented.

Good Practice Reminder

Never allow pressure to complete meal service or reduce food waste to override food-safety controls. If the defrosting history or safety of food cannot be reliably established, stop and follow the organisation's corrective-action procedure.

Summary, Safe Defrosting Checklist & Further Information

Safe defrosting is an important part of effective food-safety management in care catering.

Frozen food should be **defrosted using an appropriate controlled method, protected from contamination and handled according to manufacturer instructions and workplace food-safety procedures.**

Good defrosting practices help catering teams:

- Reduce the opportunity for harmful bacteria to multiply
- Prevent cross-contamination from raw food and defrosting liquids
- Ensure food is fully defrosted before cooking where required
- Maintain safe chilled-storage conditions
- Preserve reliable product and allergen information
- Avoid unsafe last-minute shortcuts

- Maintain accurate food-safety records
- Protect people who may be particularly vulnerable to foodborne illness

Safe defrosting should form part of normal **menu planning, stock management and food preparation**, rather than being treated as a last-minute kitchen task.

Remember:

Plan → Check Instructions → Defrost Safely → Protect & Separate → Check → Prepare/Cook → Record Where Required

Safe Defrosting Checklist

Before Defrosting

- ☐ Check the correct product has been selected
 - ☐ Check the packaging is intact
 - ☐ Check manufacturer instructions
 - ☐ Confirm whether the food should be defrosted or cooked from frozen
 - ☐ Calculate the quantity actually required
 - ☐ Allow sufficient defrosting time
 - ☐ Ensure suitable refrigerated space is available where required
 - ☐ Prepare an appropriate container for the food
-

During Defrosting

- ☐ Keep food covered or appropriately protected
 - ☐ Maintain appropriate temperature control
 - ☐ Keep raw food appropriately separated from ready-to-eat food
 - ☐ Prevent raw-food juices from leaking or dripping
 - ☐ Keep the product clearly identifiable
 - ☐ Maintain manufacturer and allergen information
 - ☐ Avoid unnecessary exposure to room temperature
 - ☐ Check the food's progress where appropriate
-

Refrigerator Controls

- ☐ Use appropriate refrigerated storage where required
 - ☐ Avoid overloading refrigerators
 - ☐ Allow adequate air circulation
 - ☐ Position raw food safely
 - ☐ Use containers capable of containing defrosting liquid
 - ☐ Keep ready-to-eat food protected from raw-food contamination
 - ☐ Report refrigerator temperature or equipment problems promptly
-

Checking Food Before Cooking

- ☐ Confirm food is completely defrosted where required
 - ☐ Check thick or dense sections
 - ☐ Check for ice crystals
 - ☐ Check internal cavities where relevant
 - ☐ Check around joints or bones where appropriate
 - ☐ Do not rely solely on the outside appearance of the food
 - ☐ Follow manufacturer cooking instructions
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After Defrosting

- ☐ Keep food appropriately chilled where required
 - ☐ Maintain protection from contamination
 - ☐ Follow applicable use periods
 - ☐ Keep labels and identification clear
 - ☐ Follow manufacturer instructions
 - ☐ Prepare or cook according to workplace procedure
 - ☐ Maintain allergen information
 - ☐ Record required information accurately
-

Cross-Contamination Prevention

- ☐ Keep raw and ready-to-eat foods appropriately separated
- ☐ Deal with raw-food liquid safely
- ☐ Clean spillages promptly
- ☐ Clean and disinfect affected surfaces as required
- ☐ Clean equipment appropriately
- ☐ Perform effective hand hygiene
- ☐ Change contaminated gloves where gloves are used

- ☐ Avoid touching clean equipment after handling raw food without appropriate hygiene controls
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When Something Goes Wrong

- ☐ Stop using questionable food
- ☐ Separate it from food intended for use
- ☐ Establish what is reliably known about its history
- ☐ Check manufacturer and workplace instructions
- ☐ Report the problem to the appropriate person
- ☐ Take approved corrective action
- ☐ Record the incident where required
- ☐ Review why the problem occurred

Never:

- ✗ Invent a defrosting date or time
 - ✗ Guess an unknown temperature history
 - ✗ Change labels to extend the life of food
 - ✗ Assume food is safe because it looks or smells normal
 - ✗ Taste questionable food to determine whether it is safe
 - ✗ Use unsafe shortcuts because meal service is approaching
 - ✗ Guess allergen information
 - ✗ Automatically refreeze defrosted food without checking the appropriate instructions or procedure
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Further Information

For further guidance on food safety, chilling, cooking and food-safety management procedures, catering staff and managers can refer to the following official resources.

Food Standards Agency – Chilling

Guidance on safely chilling, storing and handling food:

[Food Standards Agency – Chilling](#)

Food Standards Agency – Cooking Your Food

Guidance covering safe cooking and appropriate food preparation:

[Food Standards Agency – Cooking Your Food](#)

Food Standards Agency – Safer Food, Better Business (SFBB)

Food-safety management guidance designed to help food businesses comply with food-hygiene requirements:

[Food Standards Agency – Safer Food, Better Business](#)

Food Standards Agency – HACCP

Information about Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point food-safety management:

[Food Standards Agency – HACCP](#)

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Related Knowledge Hub Resources

- **Resource 032** – Preventing Cross-Contamination in Care Catering
- **Resource 071** – Food Temperature Control in Care Catering
- **Resource 072** – Safe Food Storage in Care Catering
- **Resource 073** – Food Safety for Vulnerable People in Care Settings
- **Resource 074** – Preventing Foodborne Illness in Care Catering
- **Resource 076** – Food Delivery Checks in Care Catering
- **Resource 077** – Safe Cooling & Reheating of Food in Care Catering
- **Resource 080** – Food Date Labelling & Stock Rotation in Care Catering

Related FlexiLearnHub Courses

- **Food Safety & Hygiene Level 2**
- **HACCP Training**

These courses provide more structured learning for catering professionals and staff responsible for maintaining safe food-handling practices.

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