Chilled food, hot holding and probe checks

Exhibitor guide · temperature control on a stand

Temperature control is usually the most important part of your food safety plan. Fridges on stands are small and opened constantly, stands get warm, and food is often on display for hours. This guide sets out the figures from food law and the FSA, the time rules for food on display, and how to check and record with a probe thermometer.

The figures

The temperatures that matter on a stand

Cold

Frozen: −18°C or below
Fridge set to 5°C or below
Chilled food: 8°C or below (the law)

Hot

Cook: core 70°C for 2 minutes, or 75°C for 30 s
Reheat until steaming hot all the way through
Hot holding: 63°C or above (the law)



Not to scale. The 8°C chill rule is law in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and recommended in Scotland.
Sources: FSA food hygiene guidance; Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013, Schedule 4.

Keep food out of the 8°C to 63°C range as much as you can.

What	Temperature	Where it comes from
Chilled food	8°C or below	The law in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; recommended in Scotland
Fridge setting	5°C or below	FSA advice, so food stays below 8°C when the door is opened
Frozen food	−18°C or below	FSA Safer food, better business
Cooking	Core 70°C for 2 minutes, or another safe combination such as 75°C for 30 seconds	FSA standard advice
Reheating	Steaming hot all the way through, once only	FSA; in Scotland, at least 82°C
Hot holding	63°C or above	Food law in England, and FSA guidance

In England the chill and hot-holding rules are in Schedule 4 of the Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013. The FSA's food hygiene guidance sets out the same figures in plain English.

Food on display: one period only

Food out of temperature control: one period only

Chilled food above 8°C

hour 1 | hour 2 | hour 3 | hour 4

Up to 4 hours, once. Then back in the fridge at 8°C or below, or thrown away

Hot food below 63°C

hour 1 | hour 2

Up to 2 hours, once. Then reheat, chill to 8°C or below, or throw away

Label each batch with the time it came out, so everyone on the stand knows when it has to go.

The 4-hour and 2-hour rules allow one period out of temperature control, not a rolling allowance.

- **Chilled food** can be out of the fridge for one period of up to 4 hours while it is on display. If it has been out for less than 4 hours it can go back in the fridge; after 4 hours it should be thrown away.
- **Hot food** can be kept below 63°C for one period of up to 2 hours. After that, reheat it once until steaming hot and put it back in hot holding, chill it quickly to 8°C or below, or throw it away.
- Only put out what you need, label each batch with the time it came out, and do not top up old food with new.

For most sampling stands the simplest approach is to keep stock in the fridge and bring out small amounts often. That keeps samples fresh and well inside the 4-hour limit.

Chilled storage on the stand

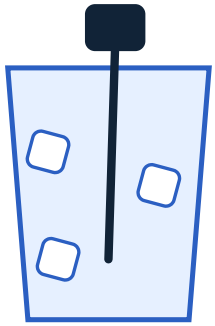
- Bring enough fridge space for the busiest day, or arrange daily deliveries. A fridge packed tight does not hold temperature.
- Pre-cool fridges and chilled display units before loading them.
- Keep chilled food at 8°C or below on the way to the venue, in a chilled van or cool boxes with enough ice packs. Probe it when it arrives and write the reading down.
- Check the fridge at least once a day, starting at opening. We recommend checking several times a day at a show, because doors are opened so often.
- Do not rely only on the fridge's own display: check it against a fridge thermometer or by probing between packs.

Probe checks

If you serve chilled or hot food, a digital probe thermometer is the one piece of kit your stand should have. Use it to check deliveries, fridges, cooking, reheating and hot holding, and to prove your plan works.

1. Clean and disinfect the probe before and after every use. Probe wipes are the easiest way; make sure they have not dried out.
2. Insert the tip into the centre or thickest part of the food. For chilled storage you can probe between two packs.
3. Wait for the reading to settle, then write it down with the time and your initials.
4. If a reading is outside your limit, follow the corrective action in your plan and note what you did.

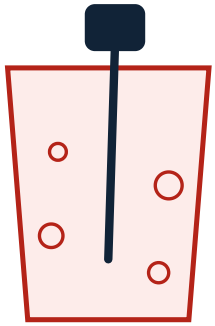
Checking your probe is accurate



Iced water

reading should be

−1°C to +1°C



Boiling water

reading should be

99°C to 101°C

Outside the range? Stop using it and replace it, or send it for calibration. Check it regularly, eg monthly.

A quick accuracy check you can do before the show.

Check the probe is accurate regularly, for example monthly or as the maker says. In iced water it should read between −1°C and 1°C, and in boiling water between 99°C and 101°C. If it is outside that range, replace it or send it back for calibration (FSA SFBB, Prove it). Some organisers ask for a recent calibration date, so a probe with a calibration certificate saves a question.

Thermometers we sell

We sell ETI thermometers that suit stands. A few that fit the checks above:

- Thermapen One: fast probe thermometer, supplied with a traceable calibration certificate.
- FoodCheck thermometer and probe: a hard-wearing everyday probe, also with a calibration certificate.
- ThermaLite food probe: pocket-sized and waterproof.
- Fridge and freezer alarm thermometer: shows the fridge temperature without opening the door and alarms if it drifts.
- Antibacterial probe wipes or single sachet wipes for cleaning the probe between checks.
- UKAS 3-point calibration for an existing instrument and probe.

See the full range of food thermometers.

Write it down

A probe check that is not recorded is hard to prove. A simple log on the stand with time, item, reading, initials and any action taken is usually all an organiser or environmental health officer will ask for. Put the log in your food safety plan.

Related guides

- Food safety plan (HACCP) for your stand
- Sampling food safely
- Food thermometers
- The AEV eGuide explained

This guide is general advice for you as an exhibitor at a UK trade show, exhibition or other event. The organiser and venue decide what is accepted at their event, so always read your exhibitor terms. Checked against the AEV eGuide (August 2026) and Food Standards Agency guidance, October 2026. Online version: eventfoodsafety.co.uk/exhibitor-resources/temperature-control/