

Date Marking for food establishments

JANUARY 2025 NEWSLETTER



Labels with day of the week

Date marking assures that your customers get food that is fresh and safe to eat. It helps you be sure that the foods prepared first are served first.

ASK: Why do we date mark foods?

ANSWER: Some bacteria that can cause foodborne illness can grow at temperatures below 41°F if given enough time. Clostridium botulinum (botulism) and Listeria monocytogenes are of greatest concern.

ASK: What foods need to be date marked?

ANSWER: Time/temperature controlled for safety (TCS) foods held under refrigeration for more than 24 hours from the time they were prepared (if prepared on-premises) or from the time the original container is opened (if prepared and packaged at a food processing plant).



Labels with "Use By" date



ASK: How long can date-marked foods be held under refrigeration?

ANSWER: Date-marked foods can be held for a maximum of seven (7) days. They must be served or sold by Day 7, or they must be discarded.

ASK: How are the days counted?

ANSWER: The day the food is prepared on-premises or when the original container is opened is Day 1.

ASK: Is there a preferred method of date marking?

ANSWER: Marking with the "Use By" date is preferred (e.g. Jan 8 or 1/8). This is less confusing than using the day of the week (Mon, Tues, etc.) as there is no confusion over which day is meant. (Which Monday – This week, or next week?)

ASK: When labeling a food, how do we calculate the "Use By" date?

ANSWER: To calculate the "Use By" date, add 6 days to today's date. For example, on January 2, add 6 to 2. The "Use By" date is January 8.

ASK: Are there particular types of labels that are preferred?

ANSWER: Yes, labels that dissolve in water are preferred. Then there is no trouble peeling labels off and containers don't end up with multiple labels that create confusion.

ASK: What if the food is frozen?

ANSWER: The "Seven Day Clock" stops when a food is frozen and restarts when it is thawed. For example, if food is frozen on Day 3, the day it is subsequently thawed counts as Day 4.



Dissolvable Labels

ASK: Do any TCS foods have shorter times than seven (7) days that they can be held under refrigeration?

ANSWER: Yes, if the manufacturer's use-by date, which has been determined based on the food's safety, is a shorter period of time, that day or date may not be exceeded.

ASK: What if date-marked foods are used as ingredients in a prepared food?

ANSWER: The prepared food is then date-marked with the date marking of the earliest prepared ingredient or the earliest date an original container of a TCS food ingredient was opened. For example, a can of tuna is opened and date marked. On Day 3 the tuna is used to make tuna salad. The tuna salad would be date-marked to be served or discarded within four (4) days after preparation.

ASK: Are there any foods that are not required to be date-marked?

ANSWER: Yes. Cultured dairy products such as yogurt, sour cream, and buttermilk. Dry fermented sausages such as pepperoni or Genoa salami. Salt-cured products such as prosciutto or Parma ham. Deli salads such as potato salad, chicken salad, or pasta salad if produced in a food processing plant. Preserved fish products. In-shell molluscan shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels, etc.). Some cheeses. Check with the Health Department if you have a question about date marking a TCS food product.



Hardened Salami

