



# How to Prevent Time-Temperature Abuse

Most foodborne illness happens because TCS food has been time-temperature abused.

**TCS food has been time-temperature abused any time it remains between:**

- 41°F and 135°F (5°C and 57°C). This is called the Danger Zone- pathogens grow in this range.
- Pathogens grow much faster between 70°F and 125°F (21°C and 52°C).

**Food is being time-temperature abused whenever it is handled in the following ways:**

- Cooked to the wrong internal temperatures
- Held at the wrong temperature
- Cooled or reheated incorrectly

The longer food stays in the temperature danger zone, the more time pathogens have to grow. To keep food safe, reduce the time it spends in this temperature range. If food is held in this range for four or more hours, you must throw it out.

**Food handlers should avoid time-temperature abuse by following good policies and procedures:**

- Monitor time and temperature
  - Learn which food items should be checked and how often. Make sure food handlers understand what to do, how to do it, and why it is important
- Make sure the correct kinds of thermometers are available
  - Give food handlers their own thermometers. They should use timers in prep areas to check how long food is in the temperature danger zone.
- Regularly record temperatures and times they are taken
  - Have food handlers record temperatures and times taken regularly. Make sure they are documenting this information.
- Minimize the time that food spends in the temperature danger zone
  - Have procedures to limit the time TCS food spends in the temperature danger zone.
    - This includes limiting the amount of food that can be removed from a cooler when prepping the food.
- Take corrective action if time-temperature standards are not met
  - Make sure food handlers know what to do when time and temperature standards are not met.
    - Example, chili on a steam table temperature falls below 135°F (57°C) after two hours, you might reheat it to the correct temperature or throw it out.