STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Food Cooling and Reheating SOP

Document no.	SOP-KIT-004
Revision	1.0
Owner	Executive Chef
Effective date	September 15, 2026
Review cycle	Every 12 months

1. Purpose

To cool cooked food quickly enough to prevent bacterial growth, and to reheat it to a safe temperature before it is hot held or served.

2. Scope

Applies to all cooked TCS food that is cooled for later use and later reheated, including soups, sauces, rice, beans and cooked proteins. Initial cooking temperatures are covered by recipe cards and the line check SOP.

Definitions

TCS food	Time/temperature control for safety food, such as cooked rice, sauces or meat, that supports rapid bacterial growth if not cooled or reheated correctly.
Two-stage cooling	Cooling cooked food from 135 degrees Fahrenheit to 70 degrees Fahrenheit within 2 hours, then from 70 degrees to 41 degrees Fahrenheit or below within an additional 4 hours, or as required by your local food code.
Ice bath	A container of ice and water used to surround a pot or pan of hot food to speed up cooling.

3. Responsibilities

Line Cook	Cools and reheats food following the required times and temperatures and logs each check.
Sous Chef	Spot-checks cooling and reheating logs during the shift and decides on corrective action for out-of-range items.
Executive Chef	Sets which items must be cooled or reheated using this SOP and reviews the logs weekly.

RACI matrix

Activity	Line Cook	Sous Chef	Executive Chef
Start the two-stage cooling process	R	A	I
Log cooling temperatures at each check	R/A	C	I
Reheat food to the required temperature	R/A	C	I

Activity	Line Cook	Sous Chef	Executive Chef
Decide on corrective action for out-of-range food	C	R/A	I
Review cooling and reheating logs	I	C	R/A

R = Responsible, A = Accountable, C = Consulted, I = Informed

4. Materials and PPE

Materials, tools and systems

- Calibrated probe thermometer
- Shallow metal pans for cooling
- Ice paddles or ice wands
- Ice bath containers
- Cooling and reheating temperature log
- Timer or kitchen clock

Personal protective equipment

- Oven mitts or heat-resistant gloves
- Apron

5. Procedure

Step	Task	Owner	Done
5.1	**Decide which items need active cooling** As soon as a batch of soup, sauce, rice or cooked protein will not be served or hot held immediately, the line cook flags it for active cooling rather than leaving it to cool on the counter.	Line Cook	☐
5.2	**Transfer food into shallow pans** Divide hot food into shallow metal pans no deeper than about 2 inches, or use an ice paddle in a stockpot, to increase surface area for faster cooling.	Line Cook	☐
5.3	**Start the first cooling stage** Place the pans uncovered in an ice bath or in the walk-in with space around them for airflow, and note the start time and starting temperature on the cooling log.	Line Cook	☐
5.4	**Check temperature at the two-hour mark** At two hours, probe the thickest part of the food and record the temperature on the log to confirm it has dropped to 70 degrees Fahrenheit or below. **Checkpoint:** Food reaches 70 degrees Fahrenheit or below within 2 hours of starting to cool, or as required by your local food code.	Line Cook	☐
5.5	**Continue cooling to the final temperature** If the first stage passed, keep the food cooling uncovered or loosely covered until it reaches 41 degrees Fahrenheit or below, within 4 more hours, then record the time and temperature. **Checkpoint:** Food reaches 41 degrees Fahrenheit or below within a total of 6 hours from the start of cooling, or as required by your local food code.	Line Cook	☐

Step	Task	Owner	Done
5.6	**Handle food that fails a cooling checkpoint** If the food is still above 70 degrees Fahrenheit after 2 hours, or above 41 degrees Fahrenheit after the full cooling window, discard it and note the reason on the log. **Warning:** Food that fails a cooling checkpoint must be thrown away, not restarted or served.	Sous Chef	☐
5.7	**Cover and label cooled food** Once food reaches 41 degrees Fahrenheit or below, cover the pan, label it with the item name, cooled date and use-by date, and move it to its normal storage shelf.	Line Cook	☐
5.8	**Pull the correct item for reheating** When reheating for hot holding or service, pull the labeled item and check that it is within its use-by date before heating it.	Line Cook	☐
5.9	**Reheat to the required temperature quickly** Reheat the food on the stove, in the oven or in another rapid-heating method until it reaches at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit within 2 hours, or as required by your local food code. **Warning:** Never reheat food in a slow cooker or steam table, since they do not heat fast enough to pass through the danger zone safely.	Line Cook	☐
5.10	**Verify reheating temperature before holding** Probe the thickest part of the reheated food and record the temperature on the log before transferring it to a hot holding unit. **Checkpoint:** Reheated food reaches at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit for 15 seconds before it is hot held, or as required by your local food code.	Line Cook	☐
5.11	**Discard food that will not be reheated within one day** Follow the label's use-by date and discard any cooled item that has not been reheated or used within the time set by your food safety plan.	Line Cook	☐
5.12	**Review the cooling and reheating log** Weekly, the executive chef or sous chef reviews the log for repeated failures and adjusts batch sizes, pan depth or staffing to fix the root cause.	Executive Chef	☐

6. Quality checks

- Cooling log shows the required temperature drop at each checkpoint.
- No food was left cooling in deep, covered containers.
- Reheated food reached at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit before hot holding.
- Items that failed a cooling checkpoint were discarded and logged, not served.

7. Records

- Cooling temperature log
- Reheating temperature log
- Discard log for failed cooling or reheating checks

8. KPIs

- Percent of cooling checks passing the two-stage time limits
- Number of items discarded for failed cooling per month
- Average time from cook to fully cooled
- Percent of reheated items meeting the 165 degree checkpoint

9. Common mistakes

- Cooling a large pot of soup in a deep container instead of shallow pans.
- Covering food tightly while it is still hot and cooling.
- Using a steam table to reheat food instead of the stove or oven.
- Not recording the starting time, so the two-hour checkpoint cannot be verified.
- Restarting the cooling clock instead of discarding food that failed a checkpoint.

10. Revision history

Revision	Date	Description	Reviewed by
1.0	September 15, 2026	Initial release	Ilia Pirozhenko

Approval

Prepared by	Approved by	Date

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