

DATE MARKING

Keep food safe. Date mark to control the growth of *Listeria*.

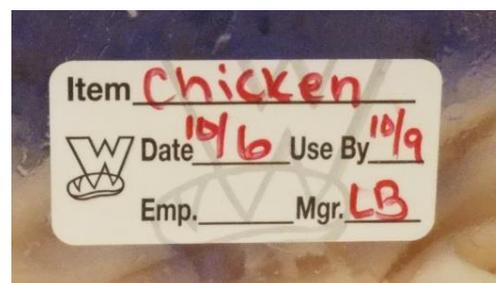
Why is date marking important?

- Date marking is a way to control the growth of bad bacteria called *Listeria*.
- *Listeria* is the third leading cause of death from foodborne illness in the United States.
- *Listeria* grows even in the refrigerator.

What foods must be date marked?

Ready-to-eat, refrigerated Time/ Temperature for Safety (TCS) foods including:

- TCS foods made in house and kept for more than 24 hours.
Some examples: mashed potatoes, cooked beans, salsa, etc.
- Containers of commercially packaged TCS foods that have been opened and kept for more than 24 hours.
Some examples: hot dogs, deli meats, soft cheeses, etc.



How do I mark the containers?

- Mark the food container with a start date (preparation or open date) or an end date.
- Either way is okay as long as all employees use the same method.



Food must be used or thrown away within 7 days.

The day made or opened counts as day 1.

DATE MARKING FAQs

Q: I go through food so fast. Nothing lasts more than 3 days. Do I still need to mark the food?

A: Yes, if the food lasts more than 24 hours, it **must** be date marked.

Q: What if I FREEZE the food?

A: Freezing food stops the clock, but does not reset it. You have to date mark the food to show how many days the food was kept in the refrigerator. This means you must mark:

- The date(s) the food was prepared and then kept in the refrigerator
- The date the food was put in the freezer
- The date the food was removed from the freezer to thaw in the refrigerator

The total time in the refrigerator cannot be more than 7 days.

For example: a food that is cooked and stored at $\leq 41^{\circ}\text{F}$ for two days, then frozen, can later be thawed and stored at $\leq 41^{\circ}\text{F}$ for five more days.

Q: What if I COMBINE foods that were opened on DIFFERENT dates?

A: If different containers of foods are combined, keep the date mark of the oldest ingredient.

Q: The food has a use by/best by/sell by date on it. Isn't that the same as a date mark?

A: No, those dates are set by the manufacturer for quality (freshness, color, flavor, etc.). The date mark is set by you for the safety of the food.

Q: What kinds of produce must be date marked?

A: Tomatoes, melons, and leafy greens like lettuce must be date marked and kept cold ($\leq 41^{\circ}\text{F}$) after they are cut up.