

Comments from the Inspector on leftover foods

Food Safety Team, USAF School of Aerospace Medicine

Even though refrigeration slows microbial growth in food, it does not stop it. Some bacteria, such as *Listeria monocytogenes* can still grow at low temperatures, and over a period of time, they may reach hazardous levels. This is especially important when dealing with potentially hazardous leftover foods being served without any additional cooking.

The Food Code states that refrigerated, potentially hazardous “ready-to-eat” foods must be marked with the date of preparation and used within 7 calendar days of that date. This is assuming that all previous time and temperature requirements for cooking, holding, cooling, and storage were met.

Potentially hazardous foods that have been cooked, and then refrigerated, and are being reheated again must be cooked to at least 165° F for 15 seconds. It is important to ensure that the internal temperature of the food, not just the surface temperature, reaches 165°F.

One more thing that should be remembered about reheating potentially hazardous leftover foods is that they must reach an internal temperature of 165°F within two hours. You can heat foods faster by heating them in smaller quantities, using pre-heated ingredients, and stirring the food every few minutes during the reheating process.

For more information, contact your base Public health office at 6-1225. Or contact the Food Safety Team at the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine (Brooks AFB, TX), at (210) 536-2058 –DSN 240-2058- or E-mail a message to diaz@usafsam.brooks.af.mil