

# Comments from the Inspector on Refrigerated Foods

Food Safety Team, USAF School of Aerospace Medicine

Most potentially hazardous foods deteriorate rapidly at room temperature. Temperature control is one of the factors that can be used to manage the number of microorganisms that may be present in food. Some important factors to remember concerning the storage of refrigerated foods are:

- Store cold potentially hazardous foods at 41° F or below. A thermometer should be placed in the warmest part of the refrigerator (closer to the door). High perishable foods, such as fish and shellfish, should be stored in the coolest part of the refrigerator (in the back, closer to the cooling fans).
- Don't overload refrigerators. Space products to allow the cold air to circulate around them. Remember that each refrigerator has a maximum capacity for cooling foods. The addition of large amounts of hot food will cause the inside temperature of the unit to rise above acceptable storage temperature.
- Store food in small shallow containers to facilitate rapid cooling.
- Separate cooked or ready to eat foods from raw foods to prevent cross contamination, and don't store food under drippings from condensers and fans.
- Open refrigerator doors as briefly and infrequently as possible when taking food in and out of storage
- Clean refrigerators on a regular basis to maintain good sanitary conditions and eliminate odors
- Finally, remember that refrigeration does not stop the growth of microorganisms in food, it merely retards the process. After long periods of refrigeration, hazardous bacteria such as *Listeria monocytogenes* will grow to unsafe levels and could cause a foodborne illness. This is why it is so critical to rotate foods on a first in, first out (FIFO) basis and to use potentially hazardous foods before their expiration date.

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 [jose.diaz@mirage.brooks.af.mil](mailto:jose.diaz@mirage.brooks.af.mil)

