

DATE MARKING

What Is Date Marking?

Date marking is an identification system for certain ready-to-eat foods that helps determine when a food was prepared and when it must be thrown away. Date marking is a means of controlling the growth of *Listeria*, a bacteria which causes foodborne illness, which continues to grow even at refrigerated temperatures.

Date marking must be done when a food is all of the following:

- Potentially Hazardous
- Refrigerated
- Ready-to-eat
- Held for more than 24 hours
- If the original package has been opened

Foods exempt from Date Marking:

- Commercially prepared deli salads
- Semi-soft cheeses (Blue, Edam, Gorgonzola, Gouda, Monterey Jack)
- Preserved fish products (pickled herring)
- Shelf-stable salt-cured products
- Hard cheeses (cheddar, parmesan, romano)
- Cultured dairy products (yogurt, sour cream, buttermilk)
- Shelf-stable dry fermented sausages (pepperoni, hard salami)

How to Date Mark:

The date marked food must be consumed, sold, or discarded within 7 days.

- Day 1 for foods prepared in the facility is the date of preparation.
- Day 1 for commercially prepared foods is the date the food is opened.

Each facility may choose any method of date marking such as calendar days, days of the week, color-coded marks, or other effective marking methods. It is important that the system be understandable, effective, and consistently used correctly by the employees.

What if I freeze the food?

Freezing food stops the date marking clock, but does not reset it.

The food must be marked with the number of days held in refrigeration prior to freezing and dated when the food is removed from the freezer to limit consumption to 7 refrigerated calendar days.

What if I combine food that was prepared or opened on different dates?

When foods prepared or opened on different days are combined together, the date of the oldest food becomes the reference date. So if you are making chili and today is Wednesday and you are combining beans cooked today with ground beef cooked Monday, the chili's day 1 would be Monday.

My facility uses all the food prepared or opened within 4 days, do I still need to date mark?

Yes. Any foods not going to be served, sold, or discarded within 24 hours must be date marked.

