



# Date Marking

## What is date marking and how is it used?

Date marking is a way to ensure food safety. It is also the law. Date marking is an identification system for ready-to-eat food held over 24 hours so you know how old they are. The system helps to identify either when the food was prepared or when it is to be discarded.

## How do I know if a food needs to be date marked?

If you answer yes to all 5 of these questions, then the food must be date marked.

1. Does the food require refrigeration?
2. If commercially packaged, has the original package been opened?
3. Is the food ready-to-eat? Could this food be eaten regardless of temperature? Examples include cold, cooked ground beef and cold, cooked pizza.



4. Is the food potentially hazardous? Will it mold, or grow bacteria? Will the food support bacterial or viral foodborne organism growth? Example: *listeria monocytogenes* (bacteria) is associated with soft cheeses.
5. Will the food be in the establishment for more than 24 hours? This counts even if the food is, or will be mixed, with something else to create a new product.

➤ If you answered **YES** to all 5 questions, the food needs to be date marked. ◀

**When to discard?** If the refrigerator Temp. is 41°F or below, discard within 7 days.

## Common date marking questions:

**If the food has an expiration date on it, isn't that the same as a date mark?**

No, the expiration date is the date with which the manufacturer guarantees the food will meet its quality standards. Date marking for discard ensures the safety of the food.

**This establishment goes through food very fast. If it will be gone in less than 7 days do I still need to date mark it?** Yes. Any food not served or discarded within 24 hours must be date marked.



## What if I freeze the food?

Freezing food "stops" the date marking clock but does not reset it. So, if a food is stored at 41°F for 2 days and then frozen, it can still be stored at 41°F for 5 more days when it begins to thaw. The freezing date and the thawing date need to be put on the container along with the prep date, or an indication of how many of the original 7 days have been used. If food is not marked with these dates, it must be used or discarded within 24 hours.

## What if I mix the food with something else?

When foods are mixed together the date of the **oldest** food becomes the new date for the mixed food. For example, if today is Wednesday and you are mixing a food that was marked on Monday with a food that was marked on Tuesday, the mixed food marking would be based on a starting date of Monday.

**Are there any exceptions? Yes. The following foods do not require date marking:**



- Uncut portions of processed cured meats packaged in cellulose (salami, bologna).
  - Hard cheeses like medium and old Asiago, Cheddar, Gruyere, Parmesan, Reggiano, Romano, and Schabziger need not be date marked.
  - Semi-soft cheeses like Asiago fresh, and soft Blue, Brick, Caciocavallo, Siciliano, Colby, Edam, Gorgonzola, Gouda, Limburger, Monterrey, Muenster, pasteurized processed cheese, Provolone, Roquefort and Swiss.
  - Commercial acidified dressings like mayonnaise and Thousand Island. Follow manufacturer expiration date for Blue Cheese and Ranch dressings.
- NOTE:** soft cheeses like Brie, Camembert, Cotijo, Cottage, Ricotta, and Teleme **must** be date marked.