

Date Marking Guidance

November 2025

Some foods must be used or discarded within **7 days** of opening or preparation. This is to limit the growth of *Listeria monocytogenes*, a bacteria that grows in cold temperatures and can make you or your customers sick. It's important to date mark food to make sure it isn't kept for more than 7 days.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact

FoodLodging@vermont.gov.

How to use date marking



- Label food with the **start date** (when it was prepared) or **end date** (when it must be discarded).
- Be sure everyone uses the same method for date marking.
- Use tools to make date marking easy, like written labels or date stickers.
- Mark the date correctly. Remember:
 - Food must be consumed or discarded within 7 days.
 - The day of preparation counts as day one. **Add 6 days to the prep date to get the discard date.**
 - For example, if the food was prepared on Friday, October 2, the discard date would be the following Thursday, October 8.
- Have a process in place. Designate someone to be responsible for a daily check of date marks, or include in an end-of-day checklist.

More tips

- If you combine foods that were prepared or opened on different dates (like in a salad), **use the date of the oldest ingredient.**
- Freezing food can extend its discard date, but does not reset the 7-day count.
 - You will need to mark three dates to show how many days the food has left before it must be discarded: the preparation date, the freezing date, and the thawing date.

- You can extend the shelf life of some house-made products by following a HACCP plan. Find out more about [HACCP plans and other Specialized Processes](#).
- Use the First In, First Out (FIFO) rotation system to ensure the oldest items are used first.
- Use date marking to help manage inventory and reduce food waste. For instance, consider making smaller batches if you regularly have to discard food after 7 days.

Which foods need to be date marked?



You are required to date mark foods when they are:

- Time or temperature controlled for safety (require refrigeration),
- Ready-to-eat, or that *could* be eaten regardless of temperature, **and**
- Prepared and held in the establishment for more than 24 hours.

Examples of foods that require date marking are:

- Deli meats, sausages
- Soft cheeses (brie, feta, cream cheese, cottage cheese)
- House-made soups and chili
- House-made salads (lettuce, macaroni, potato)
- Most house-made salad dressings and sauces
- House made pickled vegetables
- Cut melons, tomatoes and leafy greens
- Hard boiled eggs (water-cooled or peeled), cooked meats

Which foods do NOT need to be date marked?



- Commercially made dressings, mayonnaise, and deli salads
- Hard and semi-soft cheese (cheddar, swiss, parmesan)
- Cultured dairy products (yogurt, sour cream)
- Whole melons, tomatoes, heads of lettuce
- Raw animal products (eggs, raw meats)
- Shelf stable pepperoni, prosciutto, salami