

# Date Marking

[Chapter 246-215-03526 Washington Administrative Code](#)

Certain refrigerated, ready-to-eat (RTE), time/temperature control for safety (TCS) foods are at higher risk for *Listeria* growth. To control the growth of *Listeria* in these foods, date marking must be implemented. Date marking is a system that ensures foods are served, sold, or discarded within 7 days. Though a written plan is not required, all food workers must understand and be able to explain the process.

- *Ready-to-eat (RTE) food* is a food that is not going to be or does not need to be cooked before being served. Even foods that will be reheated are considered RTE.
- *Time/Temperature control for safety (TCS) food* is a food that needs time and/or temperature control for food safety. These foods include but are not limited to: Dairy products; meat; eggs; fish; shellfish; cooked rice, beans, potatoes, and pasta; tofu; batters; sliced melons; cut tomatoes and leafy greens; and untreated garlic- or herbs-in-oil mixtures.

## Which foods require date marking?

Food must be date marked when it meets **ALL** the following criteria:

- It is prepared in house or is in an opened or unsealed commercial container;
- It is a refrigerated TCS food;
- It is a RTE food; and
- It is kept for more than 24 hours.

Certain foods do **NOT** require date marking. The chart below lists examples of both date mark required and exempt foods.

Date Marking Required (opened or in-house prepared)	Date Marking <b>NOT</b> required
Deli and pre-cooked meats	Shelf-stable meats (salami, pepperoni parma ham, prosciutto, etc.)
Cut melons, cut leafy greens, and cut tomatoes	Whole melons, heads of lettuce, and tomatoes
Milk, cream, alternatives (soy, nut, etc.)	Commercially prepared cultured dairy products (yogurt, buttermilk, and sour cream)
House-made deli salads	Commercially prepared deli salads whether sealed or opened
Soft cheeses (ricotta, cream cheese, fresh mozzarella, feta, brie, etc.)	Hard and semi-soft cheeses (cheddar, Swiss, gouda, gruyere, Colby, parmesan, Romano, cotija, processed sliced cheeses, etc.)
Hard boiled eggs cooled in water	Raw shell eggs or air-dried hard boiled eggs
Sushi grade salmon	Oyster in-shell
Smoked fish such as lox	Preserved fish products (salted cod, pickled herring, etc.)
Soups, stews, and casseroles (commercial and opened or in-house prepared)	Sealed commercially prepared soups, stews, and casseroles



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### Date marking methods:

Establishments can use any effective **7-day** date marking system, including color coding, a calendar date, or days of the week. Food can be marked with either the day 1 or day 7 date. **The day or date of preparation or opening counts as day 1 of date marking.** For example, day 1 of a house made potato salad that is kept for more than 24 hours is the day the potatoes were cooked and cooled.

Opened or unsealed containers and in-house prepared foods that use commercial ingredients must be discarded by the manufacturer's use-by date on the original container, even if this date precedes the day 7 date.

### Combining, freezing, and reheating date marked foods:

#### Combining Foods

When combining date marked foods, you must use the day or date of the first prepared date marked ingredient or food.

For example, on Wednesday, tomatoes are sliced. On Thursday, a layered bean dip that includes the tomatoes is assembled. The bean dip would be date marked for Wednesday.

#### Freezing Foods

Freezing pauses the 7-day period but does NOT reset it.

A date marked food frozen and labeled with the freeze date on day 3 must be served, sold, or discarded within 4 days once removed from freezing.

#### Reheating Foods

(seeking further clarification)

Reheating DOES reset the 7-day period.

Properly reheating a date marked food on day 6 resets the 7-day period and day 1 would then be the day the food was cooled.