



DATE MARKING FACT SHEET

St. Clair County Health Department

What is date marking and how is it used?

Date marking is an identification system for ready-to-eat foods held over 24 hours so you know how old they are. The system helps to identify when food is to be discarded. Date marking ensures food safety, and it is the law.

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

If you answer “yes” to all five 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. Could the food be eaten just like it is, regardless of temperature? *Examples: cold cooked meats, potatoes, pastas, soups, stews, cole slaw, tartar sauce, sour cream and cottage cheese.*
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 is associated with soft cheese.*
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 form a new product.

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 through which the manufacturer guarantees the food will meet their quality standards. Date marking ensures the safety of the food.

The establishment goes through food so fast! Even if it is going to be gone in less than 4 to 7 days, do I still need to date mark it?

Yes, if the food is not going to be served or discarded within 24 hours, it **MUST** be date marked.

When should I discard food?

When refrigeration is at 41°F or below, discard within 7 days (date of prep/opening + 6days).

What if I freeze the food?

Freezing food pauses the date marking clock but does not reset it. For example, if a food is stored at 4°F for 2 days and then frozen, it can still be stored at 4°F for 2 more days when it begins to thaw.

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 Tuesday, the mixed food marking would be based on a starting date of Monday.

Are there any exceptions? Yes,

- ❶ Uncut portions of processed cured meats packaged in cellulose, such as salami and bologna, do not need to be date marked.
- ❷ Hard cheeses like Asiago old, Cheddar, Gruyere, Parmesan, Romano and Sapsago do not need to be date marked.
- ❸ Semisoft cheese like Asiago fresh, Soft, Blue, Brick, Colby, Edam, Gouda, Monterey, Pasteurized processes cheese, Provolone and Swiss do not need to be date marked.
- ❹ Commercial acidified dressing like mayonnaise and Thousand Island do not need to be date marked.
- ❺ Soft cheeses like Brie, Cotigo, Cottage, Ricotta and Teleme **MUST** be date marked.

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