

Guideline for the un-refrigerated delivery of perishable foods

Introduction

Many members of the community take advantage of home delivery by supermarkets and other retail food businesses. This service is a major assistance to the aged, infirm, and disabled, and anyone else who finds it difficult to take food items home with them at the time of purchase.

So long as food items can be delivered safely, home delivery is a desirable arrangement and a very helpful community service.

The purpose of this guideline is to provide direction to those involved in home delivery of perishable food, other than ready-to-eat meals, using un-refrigerated transport vehicles.

Background

National Food Safety Standards

All food businesses in Victoria are required to comply with the National Food Safety Standards. The Standards specify requirements for food businesses that, if complied with, will ensure food does not become unsafe or unsuitable.

The Standards allow for perishable foods to be outside temperature control providing the food business can demonstrate to enforcement authorities that safety of the food has not been compromised.

Recent study

A study commissioned by the Victorian Department of Human Services, Food Safety Unit, and conducted by Melbourne University's Microbiological Diagnostic Unit assessed the food safety risk associated with un-refrigerated deliveries. The study tracked foods through the home delivery chain, and then used challenge tests and predictive modelling of the growth of pathogenic bacteria.

The objectives of study were to:

- 1 Determine the temperature profiles of some refrigerated ready-to-eat foods under different climatic, packing and non-refrigerated conditions.
- 2 Determine the potential for growth of pathogenic bacteria that are of concern under those conditions.
- 3 Assess the suitability of existing microbial growth models to predict bacterial growth under home delivery conditions.

The study concluded that the conditions under which most foods are handled and delivered to homes do not appear to increase their food safety risk.

However, abnormal situations such as leaving milk on the door-step, because no one was home, can adversely affect this risk.

The research showed that as only a minor part of the time is spent in the vehicle, and a large proportion of the time is spent in the store, hence storage and handling in the store is extremely important.

For this study, it was assumed the food was delivered and immediately taken in by the householder.

It was concluded that:

- Where perishable food is not subject to in-store refrigeration or use of 'cold packs' during transportation the total delivery time should not exceed four hours including transportation time of less than 30 minutes.
- Where refrigeration or cooling with 'cool packs' is used and the temperature of the food is 5°C or lower whilst held in-store, the delivery time can be extended to four hours from the time the food is removed from refrigeration or the 'cool packs' are removed.
- If there is in-store refrigeration or cooling with 'cool packs' and 'cool packs' are used during transportation, the delivery time can be extended to a maximum of 24 hours if the food is kept under 10°C at all times during the total delivery time.

Guidelines for Home Delivery

A. Total delivery time

Unless food is refrigerated or 'cold packs' are used, the total delivery time for perishable food from the time of purchase to the time customers receive the delivery at their home, should not exceed four (4) hours including transportation time of less than 30 minutes.

B. Limit heat gains

- Locate stocked food delivery storage trolleys in the coolest part of the store. Stocked trolleys should not be stored alongside windows that are exposed to the sun or near heat generating sources; or
- Use in-store refrigeration or 'cold packs' to keep food under 5°C.
- A system of temperature record keeping should be used.

C. Avoid peak road traffic

Peak road traffic conditions may extend the transportation time beyond 30 minutes. Deliver during non-peak periods.

D. Skills and knowledge

Staff involved with the home delivery service, including drivers, should have the necessary skills and knowledge of food safety, particularly with respect to temperature safety of perishable food.

E. Don't leave food unattended at customer's home

If customers are not at home at time of delivery, do not leave food unattended unless prior arrangements have been made with the customer and the customer has been advised that the store can not guarantee the safety of the food if it is left unattended.

F. Unexpected delays

Ensure that there is a documented procedure to deal with instances where a delivery is unexpectedly delayed through vehicle breakdown, traffic congestion or traffic accidents. In all instances, the total delivery time for un-refrigerated perishable food should not exceed four (4) hours.

G. Actions for home delivery drivers

- Prevent damage to packaging or bruising of food.
- Implement documented procedure if unexpected delays due to vehicle breakdown, traffic congestion or traffic accidents occur.
- Unless prior arrangements have been made with the customer, do not leave food unattended at the customer's home.

H. Advice to customers

- Advise how long the delivery will take or the expected time of delivery.
- Arrange a specific time for delivery.
- Advise to have someone at home at the time of delivery and that the safety of the food can not guaranteed if it is left unattended.
- Advise that perishable foods be placed in the refrigerator as soon as they are delivered.

Definitions

Home Delivery

For this guideline, home delivery is the delivery of un-refrigerated perishable food purchased from a food business and then delivered by the business or a courier to the customer's home.

Perishable foods

Perishable foods are those foods that lose normal characteristics and are prone to deterioration if they are not properly stored, refrigerated and handled within a short time. Examples of perishable foods include fish, fruit, milk and all seafoods.

Total delivery time

From the time of purchase at the store to the time customers receive the delivery at their home.