

Wisconsin Food Code Fact Sheet



Storing and Thawing Vacuum-Packaged Fish

There are certain safe food handling practices you must follow for fish that has been vacuum-packaged. Vacuum-packaged is also known as reduced oxygen packaged (ROP). These techniques support a preventive approach to food safety to provide a safe and wholesome product to the consumer.

What is vacuum-packaged fish?

Fish sealed in a package where the air has been removed.

What is the proper way to *store* vacuum-packaged fish?

The label on the product will state whether you must keep it frozen or refrigerate at or below 38F.

If your refrigerator cannot maintain 38F or lower, you must do **one** of the following **before placing the product in the refrigerator**:

- Remove the fish from the packaging.
- Make a slit in each package.

This allows for oxygen to reach the product.

What is the proper way to *thaw* vacuum-packaged fish?

If the label states the product must remain frozen until use, then you must do one of the following immediately after removing it from the freezer:

- If you are thawing the product in the refrigerator: Either remove the fish from its packaging or make a slit in each package.

- If you are thawing the product under cold running water: Remove the fish from its packaging either before or after it thaws under the water.

What is the risk to public health?

When vacuum-packaged fish is not properly stored and thawed it has the potential to create a deadly toxin that can harm consumers.

Fish is a known source of the bacteria *Clostridium botulinum* type E. This bacteria is a spore former that can grow at temperatures above 38F and without oxygen – such as a vacuum package. Without proper temperature and air controls, these spores will germinate and the cells grow to produce a toxin. If eaten, the toxin can cause a fatal paralytic illness known as botulism.

More information about botulism is available at <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/foodborne/botulism.htm>.

Where can I learn more about the Wisconsin Food Code?

More information is available at:

- Fact sheets: https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/FoodCode.aspx
- Wisconsin State Legislature: http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/atcp/055/75



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