



Wisconsin Food Code Fact Sheet



Storing and Thawing Vacuum-Packaged Fish

There are certain food-handling practices you must follow for fish that is vacuum-packaged, 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 refrigerated at or below 38°F. If your refrigerator cannot maintain 38°F or lower, you must follow the package instructions and remove the fish from the packaging before placing the product in the refrigerator.

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

If the label states the product must remain frozen until use or states to remove the fish from the packaging prior to thawing, then you must:

- Remove the fish from its packaging entirely prior to thawing.
- If you are thawing the product under cold running water, remove the fish entirely from its packaging.



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.

Fish is a known source of the bacteria *Clostridium botulinum* type E. This bacteria is a spore former that can grow at temperatures above 38°F 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?

- [Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection Food Code webpage](#)
- [Wisconsin State Legislature, Wisconsin Food Code](#)