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 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](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](https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/FoodCode.aspx)