



Opinion 04-2023 of the Scientific Committee established at the FASFC on the evaluation of the "vacuum preparation" additions to the generic self-checking guide G-044 for the B2C sector

Background & terms of reference

The Scientific Committee is asked to evaluate the additions related to "vacuum preparation" to the practical manual of the generic self-checking guide G-044 for the B2C sector and to examine whether this information adequately and correctly addresses the hazards associated with this activity. This concerns the addition of "vacuum packaging" to section 3.14.14 "Food packaging and/or labeling" and also the new section 3.14.15 "Vacuum preparation."

Method

The opinion is based on available scientific knowledge and expert opinion.

Advice

The Scientific Committee has reviewed the additions related to "vacuum preparation" to the generic self-checking guide G-044 for the B2C sectors. The Committee makes substantive and textual comments to improve these draft texts.

Recommendation

The Scientific Committee recommends applying the following rule for vacuum preparation: limit the time food is kept at 5 °C – 55 °C during preparation to a maximum of 4 hours. These 4 hours include all time periods of preparation (including marinating, seasoning, preheating, portioning, sauces,) of the foodstuff so that it can be packaged, put under vacuum, and heated in the vacuum packaging. To deviate from this rule, a proprietary risk analysis must demonstrate that it is safe to do so.

The Scientific Committee recommends that research is conducted on the temperature gradient throughout the food (from the surface to the core) during the warm-up phase (5 °C – 55 °C) of vacuum preparation. It is important to conduct this research on foods of different thicknesses and of different types (meat, vegetables, mixed preparations,...) and at (worst-case) temperatures applied in practice. If there is more clarity on the temperature gradient during warm-up phase of vacuum preparation at low temperatures, a re-evaluation by the Scientific Committee is possible.

Conclusion

The Scientific Committee advises that the recommendations of this opinion be taken into account when revising Guide G-044.

The full text is available on this website in dutch and in french.