

FOOD · TEMPERATURE CONTROL

Food temperature control

UK and Ireland at a glance

Chilled, frozen and hot food: the legal limits in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Ireland, the tolerances and time rules, what FSA, FSS and FSAI guidance and the BRCGS and SALSA standards add, how long to keep records, and our recommendations where the rules are silent.

Five jurisdictions

Every figure sourced

Checked 18 October 2026

WHAT THIS IS

A summary to help you find the official requirement. Follow the source, your HACCP plan and your EHO, auditor or food safety team.

THE ONE RULE

The law is the minimum standard, not the target. Work to the strictest figure that applies to the product, write down where it comes from, and alarm before the legal limit.

Limits and time rules, by jurisdiction

Law sets different figures on each side of the borders. Where a cell says "guidance", no statute sets the figure.

	ENGLAND, WALES, NORTHERN IRELAND	SCOTLAND	IRELAND
Chilled food	Law Food above 8 °C is an offence (Sch. 4 para 2). Guidance FSA: set fridges to 5 °C or below. The figure is the food, not the air (FSA guidance, 2016, for caterers and retailers, para 27)	Law No figure: a refrigerator, refrigerating chamber or cool ventilated place (Sch. 4 para 2). Guidance 8 °C recommended; CookSafe 5 °C or below.	No figure in law (852/2004 Annex II Ch IX). Guidance FSAI: food at 0 to 5 °C, fridges at 3 to 4 °C.
Chilled food on display	Law Defence: one period of less than 4 hours above 8 °C (para 5(1)).	Law Food exposed for sale is outside the chill rule; no time defence.	Guidance I.S. 340: above 5 °C for 2 to 4 hours, use now or discard; over 4 hours, discard.
Defrost, breakdown, loading	Law Defence for a limited period consistent with food safety (para 5(2)). Guidance FSA (2016, for caterers and retailers): one period up to 2 hours unlikely to be questioned.	No equivalent provision.	852/2004: limited periods outside control where no risk to health.
Hot holding	Law At or above 63 °C (para 6); defence for one period of less than 2 hours below (para 7).	Law Chill or above 63 °C, but food on sale is exempt; no time defence. Guidance CookSafe: above 63 °C.	Guidance Above 63 °C, or use within 2 hours of cooking.
Reheating	No legal figure. Guidance FSA: 70 °C for 2 minutes or equivalent; NI Safe Catering example 75 °C.	Law Not less than 82 °C, unless quality would deteriorate (Sch. 4 para 3).	Guidance Once, to 70 °C or more at the core.
Cooling cooked food	Law As quickly as possible (852/2004). Guidance SFBB: no time; NI Safe Catering: into the fridge within 2 hours.	Guidance ButcherSafe: no more than 90 minutes at ambient for small items.	Guidance Into the fridge within 2 hours; cook-chill 3 °C or below within 150 minutes (GN15).
Quick-frozen food	Law -18 °C or colder, with no tolerance in cold stores; brief transport rises to -15 °C; retail cabinets to -12 °C (QFF Regulations 2007; Scotland 1990 as amended).		Law -18 °C or lower; brief transport rise up to 3 °C; retail tolerance not more than 3 °C, so -15 °C, not -12 °C (S.I. 290/1992).
Frozen recording	Law Stores and vehicles: EN 12830 recorders, air temperature at frequent and regular intervals (Reg. 37/2005). Retail cabinets and retail cold stores under 10 m³: a visible thermometer.		Law Recording instruments in transport and storage (S.I. 370/1995); Reg. 37/2005 applies directly.
Approved meat and fish (853/2004)	Law Schedule 4 does not apply; other products in approved premises follow the HACCP plan. Meat 7 °C, offal 3 °C, poultry 4 °C, minced meat 2 °C (or -18 °C frozen), fresh fish at the temperature of melting ice, frozen fish -18 °C. Northern Ireland follows the EU text under the Windsor Framework.		
Checking frequency	No law sets one. Guidance SFBB, NI Safe Catering and FSAI Safe Catering: fridges at least once a day. BRCGS: alarms, or recorded checks typically every 4 hours (see page 3).		

Sources: Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013 Sch. 4; Food Hygiene (Wales) and (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2006 Sch. 4; Food Hygiene (Scotland) Regulations 2006 Sch. 4; Regulations (EC) 852/2004, 853/2004 and 37/2005; Quick-frozen Foodstuffs (England) Regulations 2007; FSA, FSS and FSAI guidance. Full list on page 4.

What certification and transport rules add

WHAT IT ASKS (PARAPHRASED WHERE LICENSED)

BRCGS Food Safety 9 Paraphrased	4.15.3 recording with suitable alarms on every controlled store, or recorded checks typically at least every 4 hours. 6.1.5 temperature distribution in freezers and cold stores validated and verified at a risk-based frequency (mapping). 4.16.3 transport within specification at minimum and maximum load, by loggers or refrigeration operation records. 2.10 CCP records with date, time, result, signature and verification. 6.4 listed devices, risk-based calibration, traceable where possible; act on product when out of limits. 3.3.2 records at least shelf life plus 12 months.
BRCGS Storage and Distribution 4 Paraphrased	7.3.2 as 4.15.3. 7.3.4 set maximum times outside temperature control, including docks. 7.3.5 equipment failure settled with the product owner. 7.3.7 temperature distribution established, validated and verified at a risk-based frequency (mapping); 7.3.8 again after changes. 5.4 vehicle validation, automatic load-space recording (or recorded manual checks without it), pre-cooling, driver alerts. 6.3 calibration traceable to a national standard; owner told if inaccurate. 3.1.3.1 records never less than 1 year. Position Statement 20 (from 10 August 2026, section 17 contract chilling and freezing): alarm settings adequate for the process; where checks are manual, as a guide every 2 hours chilled, 4 hours frozen, continuing at weekends; possibly less often while doors are closed.
SALSA Issue 7	Monitored temperature controls with records (1.5.2); calibrated probes and recorders at a set frequency (1.5.4) and in-house checks (1.5.5); vehicles fit to hold temperature (1.12.1); records for shelf life plus one year (3.5.2). All SALSA audits from 1 September 2026.
ATP agreement	International journeys only; UK-only carriage follows hygiene law. Chilled food maxima include red meat 7 °C, poultry 4 °C, offal 3 °C, minced meat 2 °C; frozen: ice cream –20 °C, quick-frozen –18 °C, other frozen –12 °C, with a brief 3 °C surface rise allowed during defrost. FRC class: +12 °C to –20 °C. Retest at least every 6 years (GOV.UK: then every 3).
Vehicles under hygiene law	Capable of maintaining appropriate temperatures and allowing them to be monitored (852/2004 Annex II Ch IV). Quick-frozen loads need EN 12830 recorders.

How long to keep temperature records

SETTING	HOW LONG	BASIS
Quick-frozen, UK	At least 1 year, longer for shelf life	Law Reg. (EC) 37/2005 Art. 2(3)
Quick-frozen, Ireland	At least 1 year, longer according to the food	Law S.I. 370/1995 reg. 7
HACCP records, Ireland	HSE-supervised businesses: 3 months after use-by; 1 year after best-before; 3 months after sale for immediate consumption. S.I. 22/2020 businesses (DAFM, SFPA, local authority): no fixed period	Law S.I. 369/2006 reg. 5
HACCP records, UK	No fixed period ("appropriate"); NI Safe Catering recommends at least 12 months	Law 852/2004 Art. 5
BRCGS Food Safety	At least shelf life plus 12 months	Standard Clause 3.3.2
BRCGS Storage and Distribution	Never less than 1 year	Standard Clause 3.1.3.1
SALSA	Shelf life plus one year	Standard Clause 3.5.2

Mixed stores: keep records for the longest period that applies to anything in the unit, and set your monitoring system to match.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

JTF positions where the rules are silent, not regulatory requirements

- **Chill limit:** 5 °C or the product or customer limit if tighter, units set at about 3 °C. Alert when air is above your limit for 30 minutes; action alarm when a product-simulant probe is at 7 °C for 15 minutes (no simulant: air above 8 °C for 15 minutes).
- **Frozen stores:** alert when air is warmer than -18 °C for measured defrost recovery plus 15 minutes (never over 60); action warmer than -15 °C for 15 minutes. Vehicles: alert warmer than -15 °C for 15 minutes. A cold store has no legal tolerance.
- **Logging:** every 10 minutes or less (5 for cooling, ready-to-eat chill and vehicles), with alarms out of hours and two escalation levels.
- **Manual checks, if used:** every 2 hours chilled, 4 hours frozen, weekends and holidays included.
- **Calibration:** traceable at least every 12 months, UKAS accredited where a regulator, standard or customer requires it; at least three points that bracket the operating range and the alarm set points (for a +2 °C to +8 °C fridge, for example 0, 5 and 10 °C), ±0.5 °C, as found and, where adjusted, as left; hand probes checked monthly in iced and boiling water. An annual UKAS-accredited calibration across the working range meets the periodic verification EN 13486 describes, in our view (licensed; paraphrased).
- **Mapping:** at commissioning, after changes, at least every 3 years (2 for chilled ready-to-eat, up to 5 for small stable stores); 72 hours loaded, through defrosts; summer and winter where dock doors or outside walls affect the store.
- **Vehicles:** pre-cool and record before loading; on an ambient dock, chilled off temperature control no more than 20 minutes per pallet or cage, frozen 15; on a chilled dock, set the limit from your dock data.
- **Goods-in:** chilled at 5 °C or below; 5 to 8 °C only with the journey record and a manager's decision; reject above 8 °C. Frozen at -18 °C; reject warmer than -15 °C.
- **Hot holding and cooling:** probe at least every 90 minutes (hourly in care settings); into the fridge within 90 minutes (2 hours at most), core 8 °C or below within 4 hours; reheat once, to 82 °C in Scotland, 75 °C elsewhere.
- **Records:** the longest period that applies, never less than two years.

Sources (checked 18 October 2026)

Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013, Sch. 4: legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/2996/schedule/4

Food Hygiene (Scotland) Regulations 2006, Sch. 4: legislation.gov.uk/si/2006/3/schedule/4

Food Hygiene (Wales) Regulations 2006, Sch. 4: legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2006/31/schedule/4

Regulation (EC) 852/2004 Art. 5 and Annex II: legislation.gov.uk/eur/2004/852

Regulation (EC) 853/2004 Annex III: legislation.gov.uk/eur/2004/853/annex/III

Quick-frozen Foodstuffs (England) Regulations 2007: legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/191

Regulation (EC) 37/2005: legislation.gov.uk/eur/2005/37

FSA, Guidance on Temperature Control Legislation in the UK (2016): foodstandards.gov.scot (FSA PDF)

FSA, Chilling and freezing: gov.uk/food-hygiene-businesses/chilling-and-freezing

FSA, Safer food, better business; Safe Catering (NI): gov.uk

FSS, CookSafe and ButcherSafe: foodstandards.gov.scot

FSA, Food Law Practice Guidance (England), October 2025, s. 8.9: gov.uk

S.I. 369/2006, S.I. 22/2020, S.I. 290/1992, S.I. 370/1995: irishstatutebook.ie

FSAI temperature control advice; Guidance Notes 15 and 20: fsai.ie

NSAI, I.S. 340:2007 (free sample): nsai.ie

BRCGS Food Safety Issue 9 and Storage and Distribution Issue 4 (clauses checked 19 October 2026); position statements F926 and SD404: brcgs.com

SALSA Food & Drink Production Issue 7: salsafood.co.uk

ATP agreement (UNECE, June 2024); DVSA ATP guidance: unece.org; gov.uk

Every answer behind this summary, with its full source link: jtfwireless.com/industries/food-and-cold-storage/guidance

How would your next audit go on temperature?

In 20 minutes we go through your stores, vehicles, alarms, calibration and records with you. You get the gaps in writing. No product tour.

Book a 20-minute check

0121 794 8092