Vacuum packaging

How to vacuum pack your chilled food products safely as a business, manufacturer or retailer.

Vacuum packaging (VP) and modified atmosphere packaging (MAP) can increase the shelf-life of chilled foods by limiting the growth of microorganisms. However, under certain circumstances, a bacterium called non-proteolytic Clostridium botulinum (C. botulinum) may grow in the absence of oxygen. This bacterium is able to grow and produce a harmful toxin at temperatures of 3°C and above.

It is important that VP/MAP chilled foods have appropriate controls in place to minimise the risk of this organism growing and producing harmful levels of toxin.

Vacuum packing guidance

The guidance helps you vacuum pack and modified atmosphere pack chilled raw and ready-to-eat products. It shows you how to practically develop and implement a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) based approach for these foods to control the risk of non-proteolytic C. botulinum.

View Vacuum packing guidance - safety and shelf-life as PDF (526.33 KB)

The 10 day rule for shelf-life

If the shelf-life of the product is more than 10 days, the guidance explains the rules that apply and the requirement for additional controlling factors. It provides a useful ‘Decision Tree’ to help you understand if the risk of C. botulinum is controlled.

Listeria and other hazards

You must take into account other hazards that can be associated with the products you use. Listeria monocytogenes, in particular, is capable of growing at temperatures below 0°C.

Controls for other hazards need to be included in HACCP based procedures, as well as taken into consideration when setting shelf-life.