

What are Special Processes?

Retail Food Establishments – Food Safety

“Am I doing a special process? Do I need to do a special process? WHAT is a special process?!!”

Special processes are food preparation and handling procedures that create a higher risk of a foodborne illness. These processes often require special equipment, ingredients, or technology. Because of the higher risk, additional safety measures must be taken.

There are a variety of reasons a food establishment may be interested in using a special process. For example: longer shelf-life, preservation, flavor enhancement, specific texture profile, create a shelf-stable product, create a non-time/temperature control for safety (non-TCS) food, or convenience. More than one special process method may be used in the preparation of a food product.

Before a special process is used in a retail food establishment, a written plan for the process must be submitted to the Department for review and approval. **The approved plan must always be accessible for use by food employees.** It is acceptable to provide a copy of the **approved plan** for employee use while maintaining the original document on file in the establishment for safekeeping. **Approved plan must be followed as written.**

[Regulation 61-25, Retail Food Establishments](#), Chapter 3, Section 3-502 lists the following special process methods:

Reduced Oxygen Packaging (ROP) – Vacuum packaging of [Time/Temperature Control for Safety \(TCS\) Foods](#):

- **Storage** (e.g., raw meat and poultry, cheese, melon, frozen fish)
- **Cook-chill** - cooked foods placed into vacuum packaging and sealed while hot.
- **Sous vide** - raw foods placed into vacuum packaging, sealed, then cooked in a water bath.
- **Other ROP methods** (e.g., Modified Atmosphere Packaging (MAP), Controlled Atmosphere Packaging (CAP)) – methods used to extend the shelf-life and maintain the quality of foods by controlling a specific mixture of gases inside the packaged product.




Fermentation, Pickling, Acidification – Fermentation (e.g., kimchi, yogurt, sauerkraut, cheese) is a slow, temperature-controlled process using salt and water, or a starter culture. **Pickling** (e.g., cucumber, okra, green beans) is the process of immersing foods in an acidic solution, such as vinegar. **Acidification** (e.g., sushi rice, salsa, dressings) is the process where ingredients such as vinegar or citric juices (e.g., lemon, lime, grapefruit) are added. These special processes often include canning or bottling.




Canning or Bottling – Process in which fruits, vegetables, dressings and sauces are prepared and packaged in jars or bottles for storage. Only canning/bottling of properly acidified or acidic products may be processed in a food establishment. Heat treatment is a part of the process.



 **Curing and Smoking** (e.g., jerky, sausage, ham, prosciutto, bacon, fish) – **Smoking** is a process that commonly uses wood in the preparation of meats, poultry or fish to enhance its flavor. Hot, cold or liquid smoking methods may be used. Smoked products are often cured first to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria. **Curing** is a process in which salt, sugar, and/or pink salts (nitrates, nitrites) are added to a food to remove moisture for preservation. Pink salts (nitrates and nitrites) should not be confused with Himalayan pink salt. Cured meat may or may not be smoked or dehydrated.

Custom processing of animals – Meat processed for the owner of an animal (including wild game) for personal use as food and **NOT** for sale or service to the public in a food establishment.



 **Sprouting seeds or beans** (e.g., lentils, alfalfa, mung beans, soybeans) – Process in which moisture, temperature and light conditions are controlled to create an environment for sprouting.

Processing and packaging of juices – Beverages made from fruits and vegetables that are prepared and packaged (e.g., bottle, carton, jar) in a retail food establishment. Drinks made with sugar, water and citrus fruit, such as lemonade or limeade that are **prepared for immediate service** by the cup do not require a permit or special process plan.

Preparing food by another method that is determined to be a special process by the Department.

Additional guidance may be found on the [Special Processes \(HACCP Plan and Variances\)](#) ([Español](#), [中文](#)) fact sheet. The [Request for a Special Process](#) form should be submitted along with the proposed plan.

