

LO MEI

Food Safety Guidelines for Food Businesses



Introduction and scope

Lo mei is specially processed meat, poultry and offal products in Chinese cuisines. *Lo mei* is braised and soaked in large volume of a specialty marinade (i.e. *lo shui*) for a period of time for flavour enrichment. The ingredients of *lo shui* could vary a lot, but commonly include stock, soya sauce, seasonings, spice and herbs. Various foods could be used to produce *lo mei*, including poultry meat (e.g. goose meat), red meat (e.g. pork belly) and offal products (e.g. goose intestine).

Lo mei is classified as a type of restricted food under the Food Business Regulation (Cap.132X) of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132). Manufacturing for sale of *lo mei* in Hong Kong is subject to licensing control of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) by specific licence or permission for the sale of *lo mei*.

This set of guidelines is intended for food business operators (FBO) that prepare and sell *lo mei* at premises. It aims to help food trade to implement food safety measures in their operations in order to produce and supply safe and wholesome *lo mei*. While this is not a legal document and its use is voluntary, it reviews some essential parameters related to Good Hygiene Practices and recommends best practices that any FBO should consider in providing safe foods to consumers.

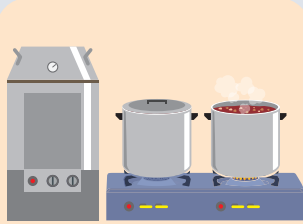
Production of *lo mei*

The raw ingredients of *lo mei* are either fresh or frozen meat or offal. Before cooking, they have to undergo preparation such as defrosting, washing and cutting. Afterward, the prepared meat or offal is braised in the marinade, *lo shui* for a period of time to impart the special taste and texture. The finished products are then cooled and displayed at room temperature. Cooked *lo mei* is commonly further handled (e.g. cutting, deboning) upon receiving a customer's order. These cooked *lo mei* may be braised briefly with hot *lo shui* just before serving to warm them up.





Common food safety problems related to lo mei



Preparing lo mei too far in advance

- To cope with operational needs, FBOs usually prepare large quantities of *lo mei* in advance for later reheating.
- Storing cooked *lo mei* with gravy at room temperature for too long may promote growth of harmful bacteria and some bacterial spores e.g. *Bacillus cereus* and *Clostridium perfringens*. Bacterial spores can survive re-heating and cause food poisoning.



Clostridium perfringens

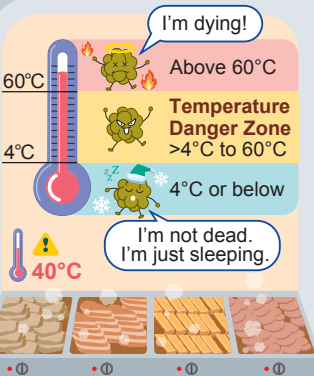


Bacillus cereus



Inadequate cooking

- Thorough cooking is the critical step to destroy pathogenic microorganisms present in raw ingredients in the production of *lo mei*.
- Use a food thermometer to check that the core temperature of food reaches at least 75°C.



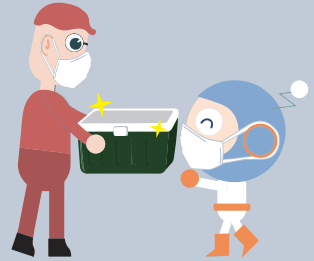
Using an incorrect hot-holding temperature

- Displaying cooked *lo mei* at dangerous temperatures (e.g. below 60°C) for too long may allow microorganisms to grow and spores to germinate, multiply and may even produce heat-stable toxins.
- It is important to keep cooked *lo mei* out of the Temperature Danger Zone, which is between 4°C and 60°C, for as little time as possible.

Food safety advice for producing and selling lo mei

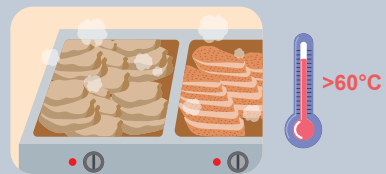
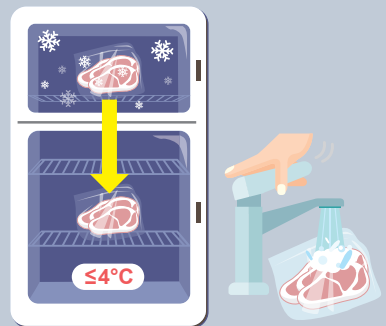
Purchasing

- Buy raw materials (such as raw meat and offal, spice and herbs for producing *lo shui*) from reliable sources.
- Inspect goods to ensure that they are free from any signs of contamination or damages to the packaging. Keep proper traceable purchase records.



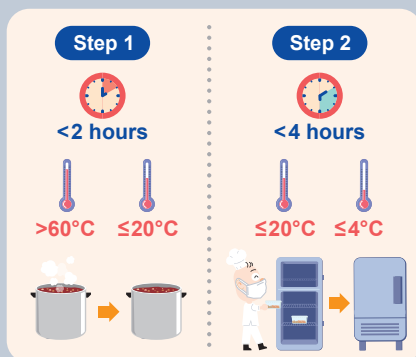
Preparation and cooking

- Carefully estimate the demand of *lo mei* to avoid over-production and to prevent prolonged storage and display at room temperature.
- Carefully plan the production schedule of *lo mei* to avoid unnecessary early production before sale and prolonged storage at room temperature, e.g. adopt separate rounds of production such as morning and afternoon sessions to cater for the actual demand.
- Regularly check the quality of *lo shui* and discard it if there are any signs of spoilage (e.g. change in smell).
- Properly thaw frozen meat and offal by placing it under refrigeration at 4°C or below, or placing it under cool running water. Avoid thawing frozen food under room temperature.
- Handle raw and cooked meats with separate utensils to avoid cross contamination.
- Cook *lo mei* thoroughly. Keep *lo shui* at a temperature above 60°C during business hours.



Display and storage

- At the end of each day's production, cool *lo shui* from 60°C to 20°C within 2 hours; and from 20°C to 4°C within 4 hours or less.
- Lo shui* should be stored under refrigeration or kept at 4°C or below after business hours.
- Reheat the cooled *lo shui* thoroughly until its core temperature reaches 75°C or above, or to complete boil before or after use.



- Use separate utensils and equipment to handle raw food and cooked *lo mei* respectively.
- Keep cutting boards, knives, utensils, working tables and wiping cloths clean and hygienic, and regularly sanitise them.
- As a general rule, if properly handled *lo mei* has been displayed within the Temperature Danger Zone:



for less than 2 hours, they can be refrigerated for use later or used before the 4 hours limit is up.

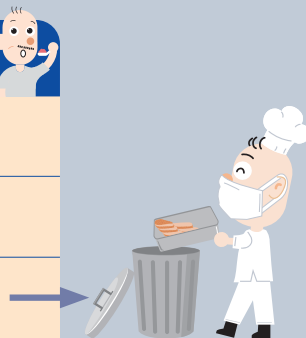


for more than 2 hours but less than 4 hours, they should be used before the 4 hours limit is up but should not be returned to the refrigerator.



for more than 4 hours, they should be discarded.

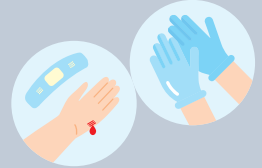
| 4°C - 60°C (e.g. room temperature) for | Refrigeration for later use | Immediate consumption |
|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <2 hr | ✓ | ✓ |
| 2-4 hr | ✗ | ✓ |
| >4 hr | ✗ | ✗ |



Advice on personal and environmental hygiene for food handlers

Personal hygiene

- Wear a mask and clean protective workwear when working.
- Discard disposable gloves when damaged or soiled, or removed during staff breaks.
- Always follow good personal hygiene practices, which include proper hand washing. Wash hands thoroughly with liquid soap and water and rub hands for at least 20 seconds before and after handling foods or after using the toilet, touching your eyes, nose or mouth, coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose, etc.
- Cover cuts or wounds on hands with waterproof dressings or gloves.
- Do not smoke, eat or drink during food preparation.
- Suspend work if you are suffering from or think that you are suffering from an infectious disease with symptoms such as diarrhoea, vomiting, fever, sore throat or abdominal pain.
- Regularly remind staff on proper hand washing and food hygiene.

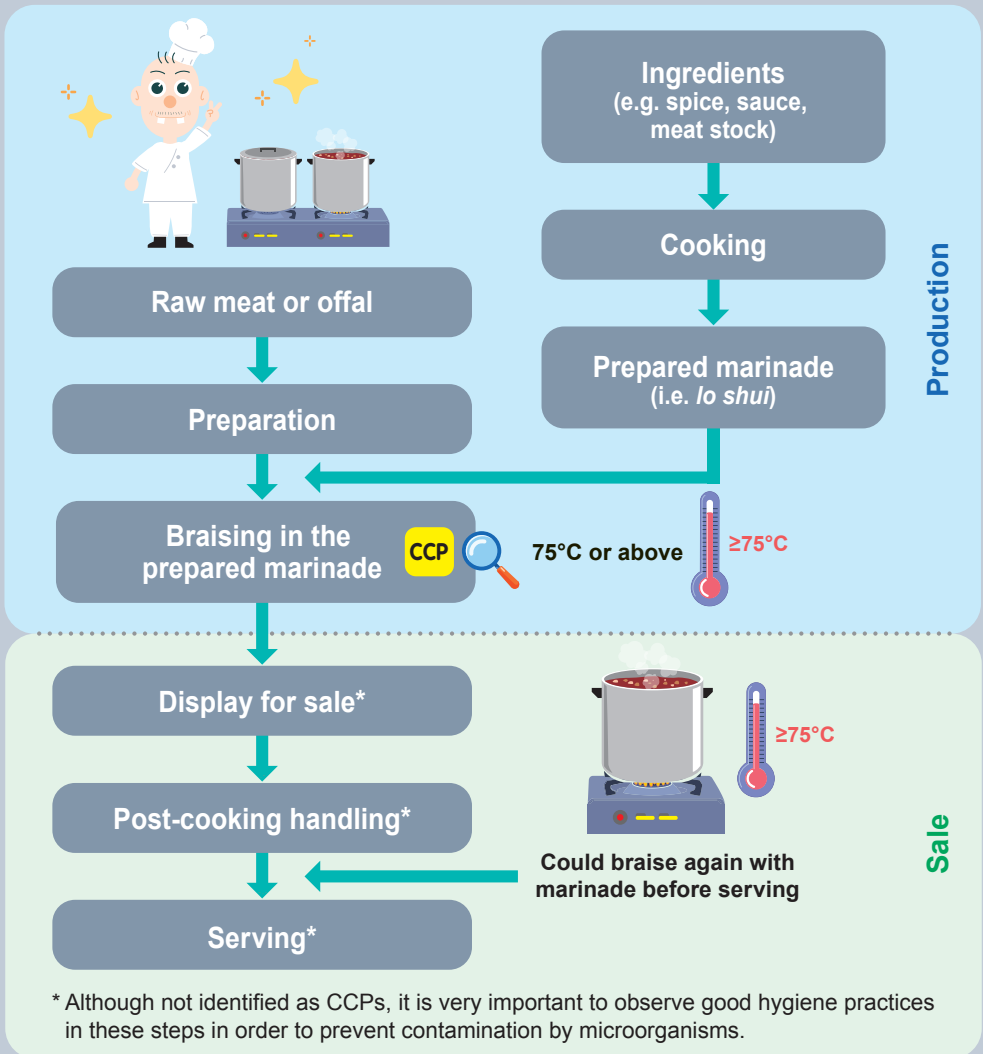


Environmental hygiene

- Clean and disinfect all utensils and equipment before and after use, including chopping boards, knives, working tables and wiping cloths with boiling water or approved sanitisers.
- Deploy different staff to handle cash and food.
- Use garbage and food waste containers that have well-fitted covers. Empty waste containers regularly.



A generic flowchart of producing lo mei



Remarks: A critical control point (CCP) is defined as a step at which control can be applied and is essential to prevent or eliminate a food safety hazard or reduce it to an acceptable level.

Advice for consumers

Consumers are advised to take note of the following food safety measures:

- Patronise clean and well-maintained food premises.
- Observe whether food handlers follow good personal hygiene. They should not be smoking, playing with their hair or have any open wounds.
- Observe whether the *lo mei* is covered or displayed in an insect- and dust-proof showcase.
- Observe whether raw food is placed in the *lo mei* showcase.
- Consume *lo mei* as soon as possible.
- Store any leftovers in a refrigerator and reheat them thoroughly before consumption.



Lo mei is an example of a ready-to-eat food that may be eaten without further cooking. They can become contaminated by foodborne pathogens and “superbugs” if not handled properly. As there is no or insufficient heat treatment to kill the bacteria that may be present, it is critical to maintain a high level of personal, environmental, and food hygiene when preparing the food. Food handlers should follow the “Five Keys to Food Safety” to reduce the risk of both “superbugs” and foodborne diseases.



In addition to this guideline, food handlers should go through the CFS' **Ready-to-eat Food: Food Safety Guidelines for Food Businesses**. Please scan the QR code to access additional information.

