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Microbiology of the food chain — Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) for the detection of microorganisms — Thermal performance testing of thermal cyclers

*Microbiologie de la chaîne alimentaire — Réaction de polymérisation
en chaîne (PCR) pour la recherche de micro-organismes — Essais de
performance thermique des thermocycleurs*

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Contents

	Page
Foreword	iv
Introduction	v
1 Scope	1
2 Normative references	1
3 Terms and definitions	1
3.1 Polymerase chain reaction.....	1
3.2 Thermal cycler.....	2
3.3 Temperature characteristics.....	2
3.4 Temperature measurement.....	5
4 Installation of thermal cyclers	6
5 Maintenance of thermal cyclers	6
6 Performance testing of thermal cyclers	6
6.1 General.....	6
6.2 Performance testing programme.....	7
6.3 Metrological traceability.....	7
6.4 Temperature performance testing method.....	8
6.4.1 General.....	8
6.4.2 Principle.....	8
6.4.3 Equipment.....	8
6.4.4 Environmental conditions.....	9
6.4.5 Procedure.....	9
6.4.6 Performance test results.....	10
6.4.7 Performance test report.....	10
6.4.8 Compliancy testing.....	11
6.5 Optical performance testing method.....	11
Annex A (informative) Sensor locations	13
Annex B (informative) Universal temperature protocol	18
Annex C (informative) Compliancy testing	19
Annex D (informative) Example of a thermal cycler temperature profile	22
Annex E (informative) Example of performance test and compliancy test	23
Bibliography	27

Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) Technical Committee CEN/TC 463, *Microbiology of the food chain*, in collaboration with ISO Technical Committee TC 34, *Food products*, Subcommittee SC 9, *Microbiology*, in accordance with the Agreement on technical cooperation between ISO and CEN (Vienna Agreement).

This first edition International Standard cancels and replaces the first edition Technical Specification (ISO/TS 20836:2005), which has been technically revised. The main changes compared with the previous edition are as follows:

- the Scope has been extended to include both thermal cyclers and real-time thermal cyclers;
- the physical performance testing method has been described in more detail, and the biochemical performance testing method has been taken out;
- information for laboratories regarding ISO/IEC 17025 has been included;
- the performance testing method has been aligned with ISO/IEC 17025;
- compliancy testing has been added;
- in [Annex C](#), two procedures to set PCR-method-based specifications have been added.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

This document is part of a family of International Standards under the general title *Microbiology of the food chain — Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) for the detection of food borne pathogens*:

- ISO 22174, *General requirements and definitions*;
- ISO 20837, *Requirements for sample preparation for qualitative detection*;
- ISO 20836, *Thermal performance testing of thermal cyclers*;
- ISO 20838, *Requirements for amplifications and detection for qualitative methods*.

This document describes a method for performance testing for standard thermal cyclers and real-time thermal cyclers that allows laboratories to evaluate if the thermal cycler used is suitable for the intended use and meets the specifications set by the laboratory.

The described method is based on a physical method that measures directly in the thermal cycler block in block-based thermal cyclers and in tubes in heated-chamber-based thermal cyclers. The described method provides a measurement uncertainty that is sufficiently low to allow meaningful comparison to specifications.

Furthermore, the method does meet the criteria of a metrological traceable calibration method in case it is used by ISO/IEC 17025-compliant laboratories.

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Microbiology of the food chain — Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) for the detection of microorganisms — Thermal performance testing of thermal cyclers

1 Scope

This document specifies requirements for the installation, maintenance, temperature calibration and temperature performance testing of standard thermal cyclers and real-time thermal cyclers. It is applicable to the detection of microorganisms as well as any other applications in the food chain using polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based methods.

This document has been established for food testing, but is also applicable to other domains using thermal cyclers (e.g. environmental, human health, animal health, forensic testing).

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO/IEC Guide 98-3:2008, *Uncertainty of measurement — Part 3: Guide to the expression of uncertainty in measurement (GUM:1995)*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1 Polymerase chain reaction

3.1.1

polymerase chain reaction

PCR

enzymatic procedure that allows in vitro amplification of DNA

[SOURCE: ISO 22174:2005, 3.4.1]

3.1.2

PCR method

test method based on the PCR (3.1.1) technique

Note 1 to entry: Examples include, but are not limited to, PCR, quantitative real-time PCR (qPCR), reverse transcription PCR (RT PCR) and reverse transcription quantitative real-time PCR (RT qPCR).

3.2 Thermal cyler

3.2.1

thermal cyler

automatic device that performs defined heating and cooling cycles necessary for *PCR* (3.1.1) or real-time PCR

Note 1 to entry: The thermal cyler can be a block-based or (individual) reaction-chamber-based thermal cyler.

[SOURCE: ISO 22174:2005, 3.4.20, modified — “or real-time PCR” and Note 1 to entry have been added.]

3.2.2

reaction block

heated and cooled metal block in which PCR reaction vials, containing the PCR reaction mix, can be inserted

Note 1 to entry: The block can be heated and cooled by a number of technologies, among which Peltier heating and cooling is the most abundantly used.

3.2.3

reaction chamber

heated and cooled chamber in which PCR reaction vials, containing the PCR reaction mix, can be inserted directly or in a rotor

Note 1 to entry: The chamber can be heated and cooled by a number of technologies, among which air heating and cooling is the most abundantly used.

3.2.4

heated lid

heated cover of a *thermal cyler* (3.2.1), which is applied in block-based thermal cyclers onto reaction tubes to prevent condensate of reaction mix to collect inside the cap of the reaction tube or onto the seal, and evaporation from the reaction tube, and which applies pressure onto the tubes to ensure proper thermal contact

3.2.5

PCR temperature protocol

heating and cooling cycles required for *PCR* (3.1.1), typically consisting of denaturation, annealing and extension temperature steps, which are typically repeated 30 to 45 times

Note 1 to entry: In certain *PCR methods* (3.1.2), a two-step temperature protocol is used in which annealing and extension are combined to one step.

3.3 Temperature characteristics

3.3.1

thermal cyler temperature profile

graph of the course of the temperature by performing measurements at defined intervals

Note 1 to entry: See [Annex D](#) for an example graph of a thermal cyler temperature profile.

3.3.2

$T_{(i)t}$

temperature in °C of sensor i at time t in s

3.3.3

set temperature

T_{set}

target temperature programmed to be reached in °C

3.3.4 average temperature

$$T_{\text{avg}}(t) = \sum_{i=1}^N \frac{T_i(t)}{N}$$

where

- $T_{\text{avg}}(t)$ is average temperature in °C at time t ;
- i is sensor i of N ;
- N is total number of sensors.

average of measured values of all active temperature sensors in °C at a specific time in s

3.3.5 temperature deviation

$$T_{\text{dev}}(t) = T_{\text{avg}}(t) - T_{\text{set}}$$

average temperature (3.3.4) minus set temperature (3.3.3) in °C at a specific time in s

3.3.6 minimum temperature

$$T_{\text{min}}(t) = \min(T_1(t) \dots T_N(t))$$

minimum value of all active temperature sensors in °C at a specific time in s

3.3.7 maximum temperature

$$T_{\text{max}}(t) = \max(T_1(t) \dots T_N(t))$$

maximum value of all active temperature sensors in °C at a specific time in s

3.3.8 temperature uniformity

$$T_{\text{uniformity}}(t) = T_{\text{max}}(t) - T_{\text{min}}(t)$$

homogeneity of the temperature distribution within the *reaction block* (3.2.2) or chamber, defined as *maximum temperature* (3.3.7) minus *minimum temperature* (3.3.6) in °C at a specific time in s

3.3.9 temperature transition

$T_{\text{transition}}$
phase of fast temperature change from one set temperature to another set temperature

3.3.10 ramp rate

heat or cool rate of *thermal cyclers* (3.2.1) in °C/s

3.3.11 average ramp rate

$$V_t = \sum_{i=1}^N \left(\frac{T_{i,90\%} - T_{i,10\%}}{t_{i,90\%} - t_{i,10\%}} \right)$$

where

- V_t is ramp rate in °C/s;
- i is sensor i of N ;
- N is total number of sensors;
- $T_{i,10\%}$ is T_i at 10 % temperature of the ramp slope in °C;
- $T_{i,90\%}$ is T_i at 90 % temperature of the ramp slope in °C;
- t is time in s.

heat or cool rate of *thermal cyler* (3.2.1) calculated between 10 % and 90 % time of the heating or cooling slope

Note 1 to entry: The heat rate is a positive *ramp rate* (3.3.10). The cool rate is a negative ramp rate.

**3.3.12
maximum ramp rate**

$V_{t \max}$
maximum heat or cool rate during heating or cooling slope in °C/s

**3.3.13
maximum temperature overshoot**

$T_{i,ovs,max}$
 $T_{i,ovs,max} = T_{i,max}(t) \Big|_{\substack{thold=15s \\ thold=0s}} - T_i(thold=30s)$

maximum temperature (3.3.7) value in °C of all active temperature sensors during temperature overshoot above the *average temperature* (3.3.4) of the *reaction block* (3.2.2) or chamber temperature at hold when heating up

Note 1 to entry: The maximum temperature overshoot is calculated between start and end of the overshoot and is expressed relative to the temperature at 30 s *hold time* (3.3.18).

Note 2 to entry: The overshoot occurs typically between 0 s and 15 s hold time. See Annex D for an example *thermal cyler temperature profile* (3.3.1).

**3.3.14
minimum temperature undershoot**

$T_{i,uns,min}$
 $T_{i,uns,min} = T_{i,min}(t) \Big|_{\substack{thold=15s \\ thold=0s}} - T_i(thold=30s)$

minimum temperature (3.3.6) value in °C of all active temperature sensors during temperature undershoot below the *average temperature* (3.3.4) of *reaction block* (3.2.2) or chamber temperature at hold when cooling down

Note 1 to entry: The maximum temperature undershoot is calculated between start and end of the undershoot and is expressed relative to the temperature at 30 s *hold time* (3.3.18). An undershoot is an overshoot in negative direction.

Note 2 to entry: The undershoot occurs typically between 0 s and 15 s hold time. See Annex D for an example *thermal cyler temperature profile* (3.3.1).

**3.3.15
average temperature overshoot**

$$T_{ovs,avg} = \sum_{i=1}^N \left(\frac{T_{i,ovs,max}}{N} \right)$$

average value of *maximum temperature overshoots* (3.3.13) of all active block temperature sensors in °C

3.3.16 average temperature undershoot

$$T_{\text{uns,avg}} = \sum_{i=1}^N \left(\frac{T_{i,\text{uns,min}}}{N} \right)$$

average value of *minimum temperature undershoots* (3.3.14) of all active block temperature sensors in °C

3.3.17 overshoot duration

time elapsed between start and end of the overshoot in s

Note 1 to entry: The start of the overshoot is defined as the moment in time where the *average temperature* (3.3.4) exceeds the average hold temperature, calculated at 30 s hold, at the beginning of the overshoot. The end of the overshoot is defined as the moment in time where the average temperature reaches the average hold temperature at the finish of the overshoot.

3.3.18 hold time

time elapsed between start and end of a temperature hold in s

Note 1 to entry: See [Annex D](#) for an example to determine start and end of hold.

3.4 Temperature measurement

3.4.1 temperature measurement system

temperature measurement and data logging instrument

3.4.2 sampling frequency

number of samples per second taken from a time-continuous signal to make a time-discrete signal

3.4.3 response time

time required for the *temperature measurement system* (3.4.1), when subjected to a change in temperature, to react to this change

3.4.4 measurement uncertainty

parameter associated with the result of a measurement that characterizes the dispersion of the values that could reasonably be attributed to the quantity intended to be measured

[SOURCE: ISO/IEC Guide 98-3:2008, B.2.18, modified — “quantity intended to be measured” and replaced “measurand” and the notes to entry have been deleted.]

3.4.5 performance test

test procedure that determines the performance of a *thermal cycler* (3.2.1)

3.4.6 calibration

operation that, under specified conditions, in a first step, establishes a relation between the quantity values with *measurement uncertainties* (3.4.4) provided by measurement standards and corresponding indications with associated measurement uncertainties and, in a second step, uses this information to establish a relation for obtaining a measurement result from an indication

Note 1 to entry: Calibration should not be confused with adjustment of a measuring system, nor with auto-check, self-verification test, verification, normalization, installation qualification (IQ), operational qualification (OQ) or performance qualification (PQ).

[SOURCE: ISO/IEC Guide 99:2007, 2.39, modified — Note 1 to entry has replaced the original Notes 1, 2 and 3 to entry.]

4 Installation of thermal cyclers

The manufacturer's instructions shall be followed.

The following should be taken into consideration.

- a) Thermal cyclers should be installed and operated at suitable environmental conditions that do not invalidate the results or adversely affect the required quality of any test.
- b) The environmental conditions that should at minimum be taken into account are room temperature and relative humidity.

See the manual of the thermal cycler for recommended room conditions.

Thermal cyclers shall be located in such a way that free circulation of air is permanently allowed.

See ISO 22174 for guidelines for contamination prevention and separation of incompatible laboratory activities.

5 Maintenance of thermal cyclers

The laboratory shall establish a maintenance programme, where appropriate, and keep records to ensure proper functioning and prevent deterioration of the thermal cyclers.

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6 Performance testing of thermal cyclers

ISO/FDIS 20836

6.1 General

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If the performance testing method of this document is used as a metrological traceable temperature calibration, as a conformity test or as a reference method, the performance test shall be carried out with a minimum number of sensors that represent at least 12,5 % of wells for reaction blocks or chambers < 96 wells or 12 wells for reaction blocks or chambers > 96 wells (see 6.4.5.1) and metrological traceability (see 6.3) shall be provided up to the level of the thermal cycler. If the performance testing method is used for other purposes, such as supplier's quality control or supplier's after sales service, the number of sensors may be reduced to a minimum number of sensors that represent at least 8 % of wells for reaction blocks or chambers < 96 wells or 8 wells for reaction blocks or chambers > 96 wells and metrological traceability shall be provided up to the level of the temperature measurement system.

In case of individual reaction chambers, each of the individual reaction chambers shall be tested.

The decision chart in [Figure 1](#) can be used to determine if the performance test shall be a metrological traceable calibration or a performance test.

NOTE 1 Calibrations that meet the requirements of the ISO/IEC 17025 are considered to be metrological traceable. ISO/IEC 17025 describes when metrological traceability is required and how metrological traceability is established.

NOTE 2 The chemistry- or biochemistry-based normalization and verification kits available at the time of publication of this document offer no traceability to SI and are associated with high measurement uncertainties, and are therefore inapt as a performance testing method. The normalization kits are developed to optimize the optical detection and related software to enable the collection of fluorescent data in a real-time thermal cycler. These kits are not developed for calibration purposes.