

Holiday Food Safety for Parties and Buffets



A popular way to celebrate holidays or any party occasion is to invite friends and family to a buffet. However, this type of food service where foods are left out for long periods leaves the door open for uninvited guests — bacteria that cause foodborne illness. Food safety is probably not the first thing you think about when planning a holiday dinner. But to keep your gathering from being memorable in the wrong way, it's important to take steps to protect your guests from food-borne illnesses.

Safe Food Handling

Always wash your hands before and after handling food. Keep your kitchen, dishes and utensils clean also. Always serve food on clean plates — not those previously holding raw meat and poultry. Otherwise, bacteria which may have been present in raw meat juices can cross contaminate the food to be served.

Cook Thoroughly

If you are cooking foods ahead of time for your party, be sure to cook foods thoroughly to safe minimum internal temperatures.

- Beef, veal, and lamb steaks, roasts, and chops cooked to 145 °F.
- All cuts of pork to 160 °F.
- Ground beef, veal and lamb to 160 °F.
- All poultry should reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F.

Use Shallow Containers

Divide cooked foods into shallow containers to store in the refrigerator or freezer until serving. This encourages rapid, even cooling. Reheat hot foods to 165 °F. Arrange and serve food on several small platters rather than on one large platter. Keep the rest of the food hot in the oven (set at 200-250 °F) or cold in the refrigerator until serving time. This ensures foods will be held at a safe temperature for a longer period of time. REPLACE empty platters rather than adding fresh food to a dish that already had food in it. Many people's hands may have been taking food from the dish, which has also been sitting out at room temperature.



Keep Hot Foods HOT and Cold Foods COLD

Hot foods should be held at 140°F or warmer. On the buffet table you can keep hot foods hot with chafing dishes, slow cookers, and warming trays. Cold foods should be held at 40 °F or colder. Keep foods cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice. Otherwise, use small serving trays and replace them. **PLEASE BE AWARE** that use of chaffing dishes or other open flames at work to keep foods warm may require a hot work permit. Check with your Safety Specialist to be sure.

The Two-Hour Rule

Foods should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours. Keep track of how long foods have been sitting on the buffet table and discard anything there two hours or more.

Eating Much Later?

It's not a good idea to keep food hot longer than 2 hours. It is better if you:

- Remove all stuffing from the turkey cavity immediately and refrigerate it.
- Cut turkey into smaller pieces and refrigerate. Slice breast meat; legs and wings may be left whole.
- Refrigerate potatoes, gravy, and vegetables in shallow containers.

Sources:

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/Focus_On_Holiday_or_Party_Buffets/index.asp

<http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/hometips/dhp/Holidays.htm>

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Leftovers

Reheat leftovers to 165 °F. Filling a plate of food and popping it into the microwave for a few minutes may seem safe enough, but you really need to use a thermometer to make sure all the food is reheated enough to kill bacteria. Microwaves heat in an uneven manner, so let the covered food sit for a minute or two to let the heat destroy any bugs, then check the temperature all around the plate.



Special Holiday Treats

Some traditional holiday treats have special guidelines for safe seasonal enjoyment:

Baked goods: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration advises people not to eat uncooked cookie dough, homemade or commercial, or batters made with raw fresh eggs. This is because raw fresh eggs may contain the bacteria salmonellosis that can cause an intestinal infection. Proper and complete cooking kills the bacteria that cause the infection.

Eggnog: Traditional eggnog made with raw eggs is also a potential risk, again because the raw egg may contain the bacteria salmonellosis. While cooking can destroy the disease-causing bacteria, people can still become ill when the eggnog is left at room temperature for several hours before being consumed. Safe alternatives are pasteurized eggnog beverages sold in grocery dairy cases; these products should be kept refrigerated.



Apple cider and other juices: Apple cider is often served during the holiday season. Apple cider and most juices are pasteurized or otherwise treated to destroy harmful bacteria. Pasteurized juice can be found in the refrigerated or frozen sections of stores. Treated juice is shelf-stable and is normally found in the non-refrigerated juice section of stores. It's packaged in boxes, bottles or cans. Unpasteurized or untreated juice is normally found in the refrigerated sections of grocery stores, health-food stores, cider mills or farm markets. Such juices must have this warning on the label:

WARNING: This product has not been pasteurized and therefore, may contain harmful bacteria that can cause serious illness in children, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems.

If you can't tell whether a juice has been processed to destroy harmful bacteria, either don't use the product or boil it to kill any harmful bacteria.

Oysters and Seafood: Buy only fresh seafood that is refrigerated or properly iced. People with liver disorders or weakened immune systems have an increased risk of becoming ill if they consume raw oysters or shellfish.

Mail order food gifts: Be careful with mail-order food gifts such as meat, poultry, fish and other perishables like cheese, fruit, and cheesecake. The gift giver should alert the recipient to the pending arrival of the food gift; the recipient should open the package immediately to make sure that, if it is labeled "keep refrigerated," the food arrives in a chilled state.



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