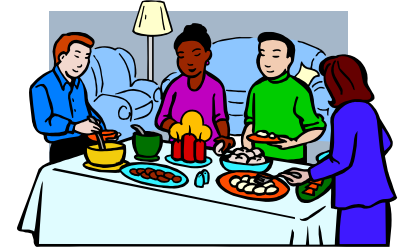




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FOCUS ON: Holiday or Party Buffets

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 leave the door open for uninvited guests -- bacteria that cause foodborne illness. Festive times for giving and sharing should not include sharing foodborne illness. Here are some tips from the USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline to help you have a SAFE holiday party.



Foodborne Bacteria

Bacteria are everywhere but a few types especially like to crash parties. *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Clostridium perfringens* and *Listeria monocytogenes* frequent people's hands and steam tables. And unlike microorganisms that cause food to spoil, harmful or pathogenic bacteria cannot be smelled or tasted. Prevention is safe food handling.

If illness occurs, however, contact a health professional and describe the symptoms.

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 temperatures. Cook fresh roast beef, veal, and lamb to at least 145 °F for medium rare and 160 °F for medium doneness. Bake whole poultry to 180 °F, poultry breasts to 170 °F. Ground turkey and poultry should be cooked to 165 °F. All other meat, fish and ground red meats should be cooked to 160 °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 way food 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.

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.

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.

For additional food safety information about meat, poultry, or egg products, call the toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854); for the hearing-impaired (TTY) 1-800-256-7072. The Hotline is staffed by food safety experts weekdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern time. Food safety recordings can be heard 24 hours a day using a touch-tone phone. The media may contact the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at (301) 504-6258. Information is also available from the FSIS Web site: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov> . E-mail: mph hotline.fsis@usda.gov

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