

Food Safety Guidelines for Potlucks

Planning Ahead

- By sending out an invitation or survey, you can find out if there are any food allergies and/or special diet needs.
- Be mindful of how far you are traveling without heat or refrigeration. Consider bringing nonperishable food or items that do not require temperature control, such as whole fresh fruits, nuts, dried fruits, and certain baked goods.
- Before making hot or cold foods, make sure you have a way to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold during transport and at the potluck site.
- Provide a way for guests to clean their hands before filling their plates. Soap and water is best.

Preparing Food

- Properly wash your hands before food preparation using soap and water for 20 seconds; repeat after handling food.
- Using hot, soapy water, clean kitchen utensils and surfaces before, during, and after food preparation. Apply a diluted bleach solution (one tablespoon bleach/gallon of water) to kill harmful bacteria that can remain on surfaces.
- Use clean aprons, potholders, dish-cloths, and towels. Launder daily if used.
- Use utensils, not your bare hands, to mix foods such as mixed salads.
- Never thaw food at room temperature. There are three safe ways to thaw food: in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in the microwave. See the “Big Thaw” fact sheet at www.fsis.usda.gov.
- Cook food to the proper internal temperature. Check for doneness by using a food thermometer. Refer to the internal cooking chart below for the recommended safe internal temperature of foods:

Beef, Pork, Veal, Lamb, Steaks, Roasts, and Chops	145 degrees F	<i>with 3-minute rest time</i>
Fish	145 degrees F	
Ground Beef, Pork, Veal, Lamb	160 degrees F	
Egg Dishes	160 degrees F	
Turkey, Chicken, and Duck (whole, pieces, ground)	160 degrees F	

Serving Food

- If you brought a dish from home, make a label for your food dish and list the ingredients. That way, guests with allergies and food preferences will know what is in your dish.
- Assign one or two people to be in charge of receiving the food to ensure it stays at a safe temperature until time to serve.
- Assign one or two people to monitor the food table to keep people from opening containers and touching food.
- When arriving at the potluck, make sure there is room in the refrigerator or oven there is a place to plug in your slow cooker. Hot food can be stored in an oven at 200 to 250 degrees F or a warming cabinet at 140 degrees F or higher until it is time to eat.
- Keep surfaces clean and use clean utensils and dishes (if food needs to be transferred to another dish).
- Provide plenty of long-handled utensils for each item so that people can avoid touching the food or in case a utensil is dropped.
- If food needs to be reheated, use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature reaches 165 degrees F.
- Serve food onto clean, small plates, and do not refill them; use new clean plates.
- When grilling, separate raw foods from cooked and ready-to-eat foods.
- Keep hot foods at 140 degrees F or higher. Use slow cookers and warming trays. (NOTE: Do not use this equipment to reheat the food; reheat food to 165 degrees F on stovetop, or in a microwave or oven and replace them often).
- Keep cold foods at 40 degrees F or lower. Place dishes in bowls of ice, or use small serving dishes and replace them often.
- Keep foods such as cheesecake, cream pies, cakes with whipped cream or cream cheese frosting refrigerated or in a shallow container on ice to keep them cold. If not refrigerated, throw out these food items after two hours.
- Use a food thermometer to check food temperatures frequently. After the meal, discard any perishable food that was left in the temperature danger zone (40 degrees to 140 degrees F) for more than two hours (1 hour in temperatures above 90 degrees F).

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Storing Leftovers

- If foods have been safely handled and have not been in the danger zone for more than two hours, the leftovers are safe to eat.
- Divide leftover food into smaller portions and put it in clean, shallow, covered containers or resealable bags.
- Immediately place leftovers in the refrigerator (40 degrees F or lower) or freezer for rapid cooling. If transporting, place food in an insulated container with ice or a freezer pack.
- Use cooked leftovers within 3 to 4 days. Reheat all leftovers to 165 degrees F. Do not use slow cookers or warming trays to reheat leftovers.

References

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- USDA “A Holiday Get Together: Cooking for Friends and Family” media blog 12/19/2016
- The Big Thaw fact sheet USDA https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/the-big-thaw-safe-defrosting-methods-for-consumers/ct_index