



Keeping Food Safe at Potluck Meals

Potluck meals offer a chance to share recipes and ‘show off’ culinary talents to friends, family and co-workers. Keeping food safe during preparation and transportation will ensure that the potluck dish is remembered for its taste and presentation—not as a cause of foodborne illness.

Why are Potluck foods at a greater risk? Carrying food out of the home for a potluck meal increases the risk of foodborne illness, even when foods are prepared using safe practices. The longer food travels to a party or gathering, the greater the opportunity for harmful bacteria and other microorganisms to grow in food and cause illness.

The risk of foodborne illness is greater with some types of food.

Bacteria and microorganisms grow quickly in some foods more than others. These foods, typically moist, low in acidity and high in protein, require careful time and temperature control. Examples of these foods are meat and poultry, eggs and dairy products, seafood, and cooked rice and cooked vegetable dishes.

Follow food safety guidelines when shopping, preparing, cooking, storing and transporting meals to keep food safe.

Shopping

Time is important when shopping for food.

- When you shop, add refrigerated and frozen foods last to your shopping cart. Then, go directly home to unpack and store groceries before running other errands.
- Before you buy food, check its condition and use-by-date to make sure it is safe to eat.

Preparing

Keep hands, surfaces and utensils clean.

- Always wash hands in warm soapy water before preparing food and after using the bathroom or tending to children and pets.
- Wash hands after cutting raw meat, poultry or fish and before handling other foods.
- Use a clean cutting board to cut up food. Consider using one cutting board to cut up vegetables, fruit and bread, and a separate cutting board to cut up meat, poultry and fish.
- Thaw food in the refrigerator.

Fight BAC!™ — Keep Food Safe

- ✓ **Clean** hands, kitchen utensils, appliances and surfaces with hot soapy water before and after food preparation.
- ✓ **Separate** cooked food from raw foods during preparation and storage. Plates, utensils and cutting boards used to prepare raw foods, should not be used to handle cooked foods.
- ✓ **Cook** food to the recommended temperature. The temperature required depends on the cut of meat and poultry. Use a food thermometer and the chart on the next page to check the internal temperature of foods.
- ✓ **Chill** food to recommended temperatures. Keep refrigerator temperature at 40°F or lower and freezers at 0°F or lower. Refrigerate foods quickly. Defrost and marinate food in the refrigerator.

Keep time and temperature in mind when bringing food to an event to keep food safe and enjoyable.

Follow
the
2-hour
rule

Prepared food should not be left out on tables or counters for more than 2 hours. Holding food for more than 2 hours in the temperature “danger zone” (40-140°F) will allow harmful microorganisms to grow.

Cooking

Cook meat, poultry, fish, eggs and casseroles to recommended temperatures.

- Use a thermometer and the Safe Cooking Temperatures chart to check the temperature of food prior to serving.
- Cook meat and poultry to the recommended temperatures. Avoid partially cooking dishes to finish cooking later.
- If you cook food ahead of time, divide large portions of food into small, shallow containers for storage in the refrigerator. This will help the food cool quickly and safely.

Storing

Time and temperature is the key to keeping foods safe.

- Remember the 2-hour rule—if prepared food is left out on the table or counter for more than 2 hours, it should be discarded.
- Store food in the refrigerator or on ice (40°F or lower) until ready to serve.
- Use or freeze fresh meat, poultry or fish within a few days from the time of purchase.
- Place wrapped raw meat, poultry and fish on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator to prevent juices from dripping on other foods.

Transporting

Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.

- Keep hot food at 140°F or higher, until arrival at the potluck.
- Store food in a crockpot or wrap casserole dishes in aluminum foil and newspaper to insulate food during travel.
- Keep cold foods at 40°F or lower.
- Pack salads and cold entrees in coolers with ice or ice packs.

Safe Cooking Temperatures

Fresh Beef, Veal, Lamb

Minimum temperature (medium rare)	145° F
Ground	160° F

Poultry

Chicken & Turkey (whole, parts, ground)	165° F
Stuffing (cooked alone or in bird)	165° F

Fresh Pork or Ham

Minimum temperature (medium)	160° F
Precooked Ham (to reheat)	140° F

Eggs & Egg Dishes

Eggs	Cook until yolk & white are firm
Egg Dishes	160° F

Fish 145° F

Leftovers & Casseroles 165° F



A foodborne illness can lead to flu-like symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramps, fever, headache and muscle pain. Symptoms can be more severe and even life-threatening for children, older adults, pregnant women and individuals with chronic illness.

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