

### Food Safety for Community Suppers

A community supper can be a fun-filled food related event, but without proper attention to food safety it can turn into a food-safety disaster. Follow these basic safety tips to keep the fun from becoming a disaster!

#### **KEEP FOODS CLEAN**

Food can be infected by coughs, sneezes, handling, dirty equipment, vermin, animals and wastes. It should be protected during storage, preparation, display and service.

**Keep Your Hands Clean:** Wash your hands! Wash hands and fingernails thoroughly with soap and water before working with foods, after using the toilet and every time they are soiled. Hands become the most potentially dangerous when seemingly innocent acts like scratching the scalp, running fingers through hair or touching a pimple become the cause for contaminating foods. Follow these steps to wash your hands:

- Step 1. Wet hands thoroughly with warm water.
- Step 2. Apply soap generously.
- Step 3. Rub hands for a least 20 seconds.
- Step 4. Scrub under nails with a clean nailbrush.
- Step 5. Rinse hands well with warm water.
- Step 6. Dry hands using a clean paper towel.

**Workers Must Be Healthy:** Diseases may be passed to other people in food. Germs from infected wounds may cause food poisoning. Persons with open wounds, sore throats, diarrhea, and eye or ear infections should not handle foods. All workers should wear clean clothing, including aprons or smocks, closed leather shoes (no sandals or canvas tennis shoes), and a hairnet or a bandana to restrain hair. If workers are actually going to touch the food, they should wear clean plastic gloves or bags over their hands.

**Keep Utensils Clean:** Paper plates and cups must be clean. Handle them carefully to keep them sanitary. After using other utensils, scrape them, wash them in hot, soapy water, rinse and immerse them in hot water (140 °F) that contains ½ table-spoon chlorine bleach per 1 gallon of water.

#### **KEEP FOODS AT THE RIGHT TEMPERATURE**

Food is safest immediately after it is prepared. The longer it is held, hot or cold, the greater the chance that it will become a safety hazard. Hot foods should be kept hot (140 °F or higher) for no longer than two hours, and cold foods should be kept cold (40 °F or lower).

If it takes two hours to make a chicken salad and it is refrigerated overnight and the next day it is left on the buffet table for two hours, the total time at room temperature is four hours. Food that has been contaminated and allowed to remain at room temperature for four hours can cause a gastrointestinal upset. Putting food in the refrigerator slows the contamination process; it does not stop it. The most perishable foods are those containing meat, poultry, seafood, eggs or milk.

**Keep Hot Foods Hot (Above 140 °F):** Bacteria grow best in lukewarm foods. Keep protein foods such as seafood, poultry and cooked meats hot by using an electric hot tray or chafing dish. Small candle warming units may not keep hot foods hot enough. Never let these foods stand at room temperature for more than two hours, (including preparation, storage and serving time). Casseroles, gravies and meats are safest if they are maintained at 165 °F or above.

**Keep Cold Foods Cold (Below 40 °F):**

Cream pie, puddings, seafood salads and many other dishes made with eggs, fish, meat and poultry need to be kept cold. This keeps dangerous bacteria from growing. Do not let these foods stand at room temperature more than two hours (including preparation, storage and serving time).

Hot and cold holding systems present special problems in food handling. Most foodborne illnesses are caused by using improper holding temperatures for hazardous foods or by preparing foods too long before they are eaten. A knowledgeable food-service worker should supervise hot and cold holding systems for buffets or dinners. At the very least, ask an adult to accept responsibility for monitoring the temperatures in the food-holding units. Food temperatures must be monitored during preparation, storage and service to be sure that hot foods are hot enough and cold foods are cold enough to be safe. Measure food temperature at regular intervals with a metal-stem thermometer and sanitize the stem between uses.

**HANDLE FOODS APPROPRIATELY****Food That Are Stable at Room Temperature:**

Dry foods (breads, granola and crackers) are stable at room temperature, as are foods like jams, jellies or pickles that are “preserved” with sugar, salt or vinegar. If hot and cold storage facilities are unavailable or inadequate, the safest choices are foods that are stable at room temperature.

**Foods That Are Sometimes Problematic:** Cooked fruits and vegetables and processed meats belong in this category. Be cautious with cooked vegetables, fruit salads, green salads, luncheon meats, hot dogs and cheeses.

**Foods That Are Potentially Hazardous:** All foods of animal origin and cooked starch foods are potentially hazardous. Exercise extreme caution with meats, potatoes and potato-containing foods, cooked rice, custards, puddings and these types of pies, gravies, bread stuffing, beans, mixed salads containing meat, starchy foods and/or whipped cream, and milk- and egg-containing desserts.

**SAFELY HANDLE TAKE-OUT FOODS**

Sometimes people will bring take-out foods to a community supper. The same basic food safety rules apply to prepared foods bought from a deli or restaurant.

- Do not leave take-out foods at room temperature longer than two hours.
- Refrigerate cold foods at 40 °F or lower until serving time.
- If the food is hot, and you’ll be eating within two hours, keep it hot (140 °F) in a 200 °F to 250 °F oven.
- If you are picking up hot foods far in advance, refrigerate them. “Thick foods” such as stews and layers of meat slices should be put in shallow dishes and limited to a depth of 2 inches so they cool faster.

**SAFELY HANDLE BEVERAGES**

Acidic beverages such as fruit juice or punch must be prepared, stored and served in containers made from food-grade plastic, stainless steel, or glass. Porcelain, enamelware or metals other than stainless steel should not be used.

**SAFELY HANDLE LEFTOVERS**

- Divide large amounts of hot leftovers directly into small, shallow containers for quick cooling and place directly in the refrigerator or freezer. Discard food that has been left standing at room temperature for more than two hours.
- Date leftovers so they can be used within a safe time. Most foods remain safe when refrigerated for three to five days, although ground meats and meat gravies should be kept only for one to two days.
- If in doubt, throw it out rather than risk a foodborne illness.
- Never taste food that looks or smells strange to see if you can still use it. Even a small amount of contaminated food can cause illness.

## FOOD HANDLING ERRORS TO AVOID

Here are some food handling errors common to community suppers and how to prevent them.

**Food handling error #1:** Food is not kept cold enough (below 40 °F).

- Avoid leaving food at room temperature. Never thaw meat on the counter or hold casseroles at room temperature before baking.
- Refrigerate food in shallow containers. Pan should be no deeper than 3 inches. The center of hot foods that are cooling should reach a temperature of 45 °F within four hours to prevent growth of microbes.
- Cool food in containers with loose covers. Tight covers do not allow air to circulate around the food to cool it rapidly,
- Place containers of hot food in the refrigerator side by side with air space in between.
- Refrigerator temperature should be between 35 and 40 °F.

**Food-Handling Error #2:** Food is not kept hot enough (above 140 °F).

- Do not let hot food stand at room temperature.
- Do not prepare food more than four hours before serving it. Prepare potentially hazardous foods no more than three hours before serving.
- When using a hot-holding table, be sure food temperature is above 140 °F.
- Cover pans containing hot food so that heat does not escape rapidly.

**Food Handling Error #3:** Food is cooked inadequately.

- Make sure that all parts of the food are cooked to the proper temperature. For information on safe internal temperatures, see Table 1.
- Do not cook foods slowly at a low temperature. If cooking takes six hours or more or if cooking temperature is less than 300 °F, microorganisms may grow during the early cooking period.
- Do not partially cook and then hold food before final cooking.

- Do not cook without a heat source. For example, do not preheat the oven to 450 °F, put a casserole in to bake, then turn the oven off and let the casserole stand in the oven for an hour.
- Do not cook “by the clock.” Use a thermometer.

**Table 1. Minimum Internal Temperatures**

<u>Raw Food</u>	<u>Internal Temperature</u>
<b>Ground Products</b>	
Hamburger	160 °F
Beef, veal, lamb, pork	160 °F
Chicken, turkey	165 °F
<b>Beef, Veal, Lamb</b>	
Roasts and Steaks	
<i>Medium-rare</i>	145 °F
<i>Medium</i>	160 °F
<i>Well-done</i>	170 °F
<b>Pork</b>	
Chops, roasts, ribs	
<i>Medium</i>	160 °F
<i>Well-done</i>	170 °F
Ham, fresh	160 °F
Sausage, fresh	160 °F
<b>Poultry</b>	
Chicken, whole and pieces	180 °F
Duck	180 °F
Turkey (unstuffed)	180 °F
Whole	180 °F
Breast	170 °F
Dark meat	180 °F
Stuffing (cook separately)	165 °F
<b>Eggs</b>	
Fried, poached	Yolk & white are firm
Casseroles	160 °F
Sauces, custards	160 °F
SOURCE: USDA and FDA. <i>Fight BAC!</i> URL <a href="http://www.fightbac.org/word/index.html">http://www.fightbac.org/word/index.html</a>	

## Food Handling Error #4: Cross-contamination of food.

- Keep cooked foods from contact with raw foods.
- Thaw and store meat and poultry in a pan or tray with a lip to prevent dripping juices from contaminating finished food products.
- Wash and sanitize any equipment, utensils, counter tops, surfaces and hands that have touched raw foods before allowing contact with finished foods.
- Wash and sanitize counters and utensils every two hours when food is being prepared. To sanitize utensils, immerse them in water containing ½ tablespoon chlorine bleach per 1 gallon of warm water for a minimum of 1 minute. Utensils can be hot sanitized by immersing them in water that is 170 °F for no less than 30 seconds. Rinse cycles in dishwashers should be 180 °F. Sanitize counters by washing them with a solution of 1 tablespoon chlorine bleach per 1 gallon of warm water.

## FOOD SAFETY CONTROL

Churches, schools and other groups qualify as food-service establishments when they offer individual portions of food for sale at bazaars and bake sales. If your organization is planning a food-related activity, contact your local public health department. The health department can inspect the facilities. They can also give advice about the types of foods that can be prepared safely and tell you about regulations that may apply to your planned event.

### SOURCES:

1. Mississippi State University Extension Service. *Feeding a Crowd? Do it Safely*. Prepared by Dr. Evelyn Spindler, March 1998.
2. University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, *Holiday Food Safety*. Prepared by Alice Henneman, November 1996
3. University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service. *Food Safety for Bazaars, Buffets and Community Suppers*. Prepared by Susan Brewer (1994). [WWW document]. URL [http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~vista/pdf\\_pubs/FOODSAFE.PDF](http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~vista/pdf_pubs/FOODSAFE.PDF)

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