

Don't be a party pooper! top ten rules for safe buffets

Nothing could be more embarrassing than giving all of your guests a good case of foodborne illness. It is always important to handle foods carefully, but when preparing foods for a crowd, it is especially important. When preparing foods for your party, keep in mind these ten simple rules for keeping your buffets safe and keeping you and your guests from being party poopers.

Rule 1. Get foods home quickly from the store. Do not let potentially hazardous foods or ingredients stay at temperatures between 40 degrees F and 140 degrees F for more than two hours. If you have stops to make after shopping, take along a cooler with ice for keeping these products out of the temperature danger zone.

Rule 2. Always wash hands and forearms thoroughly for at least 20 seconds under warm, running water using soap. Rub hands together vigorously. Wash hands before preparing foods and any time during preparation when your hands could have become dirty or contaminated.

Rule 3. Use clean, sanitized utensils, equipment and work areas when preparing foods. A simple sanitizing solution can be prepared by mixing 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach per quart of warm water. Start with utensils that have been washed in hot, soapy water and rinsed thoroughly. Soak these in the chlorine water mixture for 1 minute and then allow to air dry. The mixture can also be sprayed onto kitchen counters. A dishwasher with a sanitizing cycle can be used to sanitize utensils instead of using chlorine bleach.

Rule 4. Prepare foods as close to serving time as possible. If foods have to be prepared ahead, make sure foods to be served cold stay cold, at 40 degrees F or below. Foods to be served hot should be refrigerated and then reheated before serving if they are prepared more than two hours in advance of serving.

Rule 5. When foods require cooking, make sure they are cooked thoroughly. Here are the minimum temperatures products must reach internally to be safe: Beef, pork, lamb and veal steaks, chops, and roasts: 145 degrees F. Ground meats: 160 degrees F. All poultry, including ground: 165 degrees F. (For reasons of personal preference, consumers may choose to cook to higher temperatures such as 180 degrees F.) Stuffing: 165 degrees F. Dishes containing eggs: 160 degrees F.

Rule 6. Use food thermometers (either meat thermometers, candy thermometers or test thermometers) to check product temperatures. Check to see that the proper temperatures for doneness have been reached and that temperatures for holding foods are either at 40 degrees F or below or above 140 degrees F.

Rule 7. If foods were prepared ahead for serving, foods to be served hot should be treated as leftovers. Reheat solid foods to at least 165 degrees F and liquid foods like soups or sauces to a rolling boil.

Rule 8. When serving holiday buffets, it is best to divide foods into smaller quantities and dishes and replace these on the serving table often. Keep cold foods cold by placing them on crushed ice. Keep hot foods hot by using chafing dishes or warming trays. The rule about never leaving potentially hazardous foods at room temperature for more than two hours becomes especially important when there are several people around the food. The more

contact there is with the foods, the greater the risk that foods can become contaminated. When left in the temperature danger zone, bacteria can start to multiply or produce toxins that may cause problems.

Rule 9. Cut down on contact with food, and thus on chances for contamination to occur, by providing guests with serving utensils on the buffet. These may include serving forks or spoons, ladles, fringed toothpicks, etc.

Rule 10. If you have doubts about the safety of a food, it is best to discard it. BE SURE, BE SAFE. DO NOT BE A PARTY POOPER.

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