

Extension Update

From: Sarah Purcell, Extension Educator
Phone: 402-269-2301
Release Date: Immediate

Seasonal Food Safety: Buffets

A popular way to celebrate the holidays or any occasion is to invite friends and family to a buffet. 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.

Always wash your hands before and after handling food. Keep your kitchen, dishes, and utensils clean. Always serve food on clean plates, not those previously holding raw meat and poultry. Otherwise, bacteria which may have been present in the raw meat juice can contaminate the food to be served.

Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of meat, poultry, and egg dishes. Using a food thermometer not only keeps your family and friends safe from harmful food bacteria, but it also helps you avoid overcooking, giving you a safe and flavorful meal.

Cook fresh roast beef, veal, and lamb to at least 145° F for medium rare and 160° F for medium doneness.

Roast whole poultry, whole game birds, poultry breasts, ground poultry, and ground game meat to 165° F. All other meat, fish, egg dishes, and ground red meats should be cooked to 160° F.

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° F - 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 taken food from the dish, which has also been sitting out at room temperature.

Potentially hazardous foods should not sit at room temperature for more than **two (2) hours**. Keep track of how long these foods have been sitting on the buffet table and discard anything sitting out two hours or more.

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 more information, contact Nebraska Extension in Otoe County at 402-269-2301 or the USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-674-6854.

#####

Sarah Purcell is a Nebraska Extension Educator for Otoe County and Southeast Nebraska. She can be reached as 402-269-2301 or via email at spurcell2@unl.edu.

