

Newstip
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Avoid uninvited bacteria at holiday potlucks

Don't let foodborne illness spoil the fun of holiday potlucks. Pregnant women, young children, older adults, and guests in poor health will be more susceptible to illness caused by poor food handling.

Temperature control is the key to preventing bacterial growth. Perishable foods should not be held at room temperature longer than 2 to 3 hours. Keep hot foods hot (above 140° F.) and cold foods cold (refrigerator temperature).

Keep storage temperature in mind when planning the menu. Will there be a long wait before the food is eaten? If so, will there be enough space in a refrigerator and oven to keep foods at the right temperature until mealtime?

For office parties, it might be more appropriate for co-workers to bring ingredients for a main dish that can be prepared shortly before mealtime. For example, a hearty soup could be made from raw vegetables, pasta, and ground beef. Pizza topping contributions might include cheese, salami, olives, tomato sauce, and raw vegetables.

For family gatherings, assign less perishable meal contributions to those who will be traveling the farthest. Bread, packaged snacks, raw vegetables, hors d'oeuvres, beverages, or non-perishable cakes or cookies are usually safe choices for long distance travel.

When the food is served, keep an eye on the clock. If it will be on the serving table for a long time, it's best to use small bowls or trays. Replenish these from larger quantities kept in the refrigerator or oven.

Refrigerate perishable leftovers right away. Don't assume that reheating will make mishandled leftovers safe to eat. Reheating won't destroy the toxin produced by Staphylococcus bacteria. Illness similar to the 24-hour flu could result.

If you're uncertain about the safety of food at potlucks you attend, make wise choices. Cooked foods that are moist and high in protein may be riskier choices if the storage temperature is unknown. That includes meat, poultry and casseroles made with them, baked beans, and potato and pasta salads. Avoid eating lukewarm main dishes. Look for raw fruit and vegetables dishes, breads, and nonperishable desserts.

With careful planning, bacteria won't be uninvited guests at holiday meals.

Source:

Carolyn Raab, Extension Foods and Nutrition Specialist, Oregon State University

Allow time for safe turkey preparation

When you're planning holiday menus, keep your time schedule in mind. Although many families enjoy roast turkey, it's time-consuming to prepare. Be aware that shortcuts could result in food safety problems.

If the turkey is frozen, you'll need to allow enough time for thawing. It's best to thaw in the refrigerator. Allow about 5 hours per pound. That may mean starting 4-5 days before the meal.

To speed up thawing, submerge the wrapped bird in a sink of cold water. Allow about 30 minutes per pound to thaw in this way. Change the water every half hour to be sure that it stays cool. This slows bacterial growth.

The frozen turkey can also be thawed in the microwave. Cook it immediately after thawing.

Bake the turkey at 325° F. Cooking at lower temperatures for longer times could result in bacterial growth. It's also unsafe to put the turkey in an unheated oven that is timed to turn on early in the morning. Never partially cook a turkey and then finish it the next day.

Be aware that stuffing the bird increases the baking time. Stuff just before baking. Stuffing ahead of time could give bacteria a chance to grow. Stuffing could be baked in a separate, covered dish for 45-60 minutes.

To bake the turkey, allow about 15-18 minutes per pound for unstuffed birds and 18-24 minutes for stuffed ones. Use a meat thermometer to determine doneness. The temperature should reach 165°F. in the inner thigh. The stuffing temperature should be at least 165°F. as well. Allow the turkey to sit for about 20 minutes before carving.

Food safety continues to be important after baking. Although many people procrastinate, it's very important to refrigerate leftovers right away. Because bacteria grow rapidly at room temperature, turkey and other perishable foods shouldn't be kept on the table or counter longer than 2 to 3 hours after cooking. Remove the stuffing and cut meat off the carcass. Refrigerate or freeze in-size portions in shallow containers.

Source:

Carolyn Raab, Extension Foods and Nutrition Specialist, Oregon State University

Safety is an important ingredient in holiday food gifts

Home-preserved foods can be inexpensive holiday gifts. If you're the gift giver, make sure that your products are safe to eat.

Dried fruits and jams or jellies are usually safe options. Dried fruit should be pliable like leather, without pockets of moisture that promote growth of microorganisms. Package them in a plastic freezer bag or freezer container. Include instructions to freeze the fruit for long-term safety and freshness.

If you didn't dry fruits in the summer, there's still time to make dried fruit leather. Make a puree of commercial or home-canned fruit, and then dry it in an oven or dehydrator. For instructions, refer to: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog>. (Click on "nutrition and foods" and then "food preservation and storage".)

Berries and other fruit frozen during the summer can be thawed and made into jam or jelly. Follow the pectin package instructions. Special pectins are available for products lower in sugar, if desired. Fill sterilized half-pint or pint canning jars with hot jam or jelly, adjust lids, and process for 5 minutes (10 minutes above 1,000 feet) in a boiling water canner to seal and to prevent mold growth. Label jars with name of jam and date.

Consider putting home-preserved and home-baked foods in a decorated box or gift basket for an inexpensive gift. A loaf of fruit bread, a jar of jelly, a roll of fruit leather, and cocoa mix would be welcomed.

Don't seal breads (such as banana nut, zucchini or pumpkin) in canning jars. Although "canned" products like this may be available in gift shops, there isn't a research-based method for making them at home.

Be wary about eating low acid home-canned food gifts that may not have been processed correctly. Meats, fish, vegetables and poultry must be canned in a pressure canner to be safe to eat. Up to date canning instructions must be used. Search the internet for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "Complete Guide to Home Canning" (2006 version) or go to: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog>

Source:

Carolyn Raab, Extension Foods and Nutrition Specialist, Oregon State University