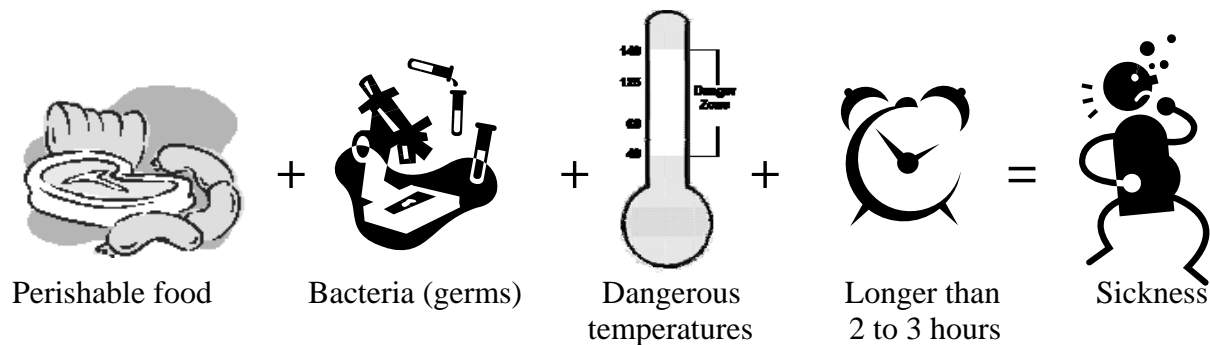


SAFE FOOD FOR POTLUCKS AND PICNICS

Discomfort after a potluck or group meal may not just be a case of “overeating” — it could be food poisoning! When the temperature is right, bacteria can grow on moist, protein-rich food (such as cooked meat and poultry, chili, pasta salad, and cream pie). Nausea and/or diarrhea can result when you eat these perishable foods that have spoiled.



Some bacteria can make you sick in just 2 hours. Others won’t “strike” for several days. Sometimes the symptoms last just 24 hours. Others last for days.

People with weak immune systems can be more susceptible to foodborne illness and may recover more slowly. Pregnant women, infants and young children, older adults, and people with cancer, AIDS, and other diseases are more at risk.

Prevent foodborne illness by handling food safely. Start by ensuring that your potluck dish will be safe when you arrive at the eating site. Safe food handling starts in your own home kitchen.

Would your kitchen pass a food safety inspection? These reduce the risk of illness:

- √ Do you launder dishrags at least one per week?
- √ Do you use paper towels to clean up raw meat and poultry?
- √ Do you wash cutting boards and counter tops that come into contact with raw meat and poultry?
- √ Do you sanitize surfaces with diluted chlorine bleach?
- √ Do you avoid washing poultry before cooking it?
- √ Do you keep pets off of kitchen counters?
- √ Is your refrigerator at a safe temperature (40°F)?

Bacteria can lurk in kitchen...in sponges and dishrags, in the sink, and on countertops and cutting boards. They come from the air, from our nose when we sneeze, and from the intestines of beef and poultry that we eat.

It’s easy to spread bacteria around the kitchen. If you cut up a chicken, they’re on the knife and the cutting board. Whatever you touch with your dirty hands (cupboards, faucets, drawers, etc.) will be contaminated with bacteria. If you clean up with a dishrag, it will have bacteria on it, too.

It pays to be cautious and assume that bacteria are present even though you can't see them. Always keep sanitation in mind when you're preparing food.

Soap and water are the keys for keeping your kitchen safe. You don't need special antibacterial soaps.

Follow these kitchen safety tips:

- √ Wash your hands frequently before and during food preparation. It's especially critical to scrub them with soap and water right after using the bathroom and after handling raw meat and poultry.
- √ Reserve the kitchen sink for food preparation. Babies' diapers and soiled gardening tools should be cleaned in other sinks.
- √ Launder dishrags and dish towels at least once per week. The heat of a drier kills bacteria.
- √ Color code sponges to reserve them for specific clean-up tasks (such as counters, floors, etc.).
- √ You can sanitize dishrags and sponges in the microwave. Wet them thoroughly and place in an uncovered bowl. Heat on high until they steam.
- √ Don't wash poultry. That will just spread bacteria around the kitchen without substantially reducing their numbers on the bird.
- √ Use paper towels to clean off counters and cutting boards used for raw meat and poultry. Then wash thoroughly with soap and water. Sanitize with diluted chlorine bleach (1 teaspoon per quart of water). Leave on for 2 minutes, then rinse off.
- √ Whether you use plastic or wooden cutting boards, keep them clean. A plastic board can be put into the dishwasher.

Food safety pointers for potlucks:

When deciding what food to take to a potluck, ask yourself these questions:

- √ How far is it between my home and the eating site?
- √ Do I have a way to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold until you eat?
- √ Is there adequate refrigeration and oven space to keep foods at the right temperature at the eating site?
- √ Can I use electrical appliances to keep food hot during serving?
- √ Are there wash-up facilities available at the eating site?
- √ Do I need to bring water or ice?

Perishable foods should not be held at room temperature longer than 2-3 hours (including serving). Have "temperature control patrol" at the eating site to monitor this. They should receive the foods and make sure that they're held at safe temperatures. Leftovers have to be handled safely, too.

If oven and/or refrigerator capacity is limited, consider preparing one or two main dishes at the site. It's also possible to have a "planned potluck" of foods that can be safely served at the site.

Delegating food preparation to just a few persons can minimize the confusion of have multiple dishes prepared by many people.

People traveling longer distances should be assigned foods that won't require refrigeration such as bread, nonperishable desserts, and whole raw fruits and vegetables prepared on-site.

Food Safety Pointers for Picnics and Outdoor Parties

At home...

- √ Try to plan just the right amount of perishable food so you won't have to worry about the safety of leftovers.
- √ Marinate meat and poultry in the refrigerator – not out on the counter. If you plan to use some of the marinade as a sauce, reserve a portion of before putting the raw meat in it. Don't re-use marinade from meat unless it is boiled first to destroy any bacteria from the raw meat.
- √ Don't partially cook meat and poultry to finish at the outing.
- √ Cook food in plenty of time to thoroughly chill it in the refrigerator.
- √ If you're including take-out food (such as chicken or barbeque), eat it within 2 hours of purchase or buy it ahead of time and chill it thoroughly before packing it in the cooler.

In the car...

- √ Use an insulated cooler with enough ice or freezer packs to keep food at or below 40°F. Fill the cooler ¼ full of ice or freezer packs, and then pack it to the top with cold food. (A full freezer stays cold longer.)
- √ Carry the cooler inside the air-conditioned car rather than in the truck. At the picnic, keep the cooler in the shade with the lid closed and avoid repeated openings. Replenish ice as it melts.
- √ Take along a water container for hand clean-up.

At the picnic site...

- √ Cook burgers and ribs, poultry and fish thoroughly on the grill.
- √ When removing food from the grill, don't put cooked items on the same platter that held raw meat.
- √ Handle leftovers carefully. Safety of leftovers will be questionable if the food has been lukewarm for longer than 2-3 hours. If a short time has passed, pack perishable leftovers into small, shallow containers so that the food chills rapidly. Place in the cooler promptly. If the food is still refrigerator-cool to the touch when you get home, the leftovers will probably be safe to eat. If in doubt, however, throw them out without tasting.

Now let's eat...

When you're putting potluck and picnic foods on your plate, look for well-cooked meat, poultry and fish. If you question whether casseroles and other cooked foods have been held at safe temperatures, pass them up. That includes green salads that might have meat or eggs in them.

Information obtained from the Extension Study Group Lesson, Safe Food for Potlucks and Picnics, Participant Handout, HE-3 895, November 1998.

Developed by Janice Gregg, Extension Agent, Linn County (formerly of Jackson County); Nona Hoadley, Extension Volunteer, Jackson County; and Carolyn Raab, Extension Foods and Nutrition Specialist, Oregon State University.



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