

SANI-GRAM

Patco 
FOOD SAFETY

A Focus on Food Safety

Winter Holiday Food Safety

It's that time of year when there are probably multiple parties and meals in your plans. Transporting food from one place to another and sharing dishes with others means more chances for bacteria to grow and cause a foodborne illness. Here are some tips to help keep your holiday season foodborne illness-free.



Holiday buffets

If you are planning a buffet at home and are not sure how quickly the food will be eaten, keep buffet serving portions small. Prepare a number of small platters ahead of time, and replace the serving dish with fresh ones throughout the party. Store cold backup dishes in the refrigerator or keep hot dishes in the oven set at 200°F - 250°F before serving.

Hot foods should be kept at an internal temperature of 140°F or warmer. Use a food thermometer to check. Serve or keep food hot in chafing dishes, slow cookers, and warming trays. Be aware that some warmers only hold food at 110°F - 120°F; check the label to be sure your unit can hold foods at 140°F or above.

Cold foods should be kept at 40°F or cooler. Keep cold foods refrigerated until serving time. If food will be out on the buffet table for more than two hours, place plates of cold food on ice to keep it chilled.

Don't add new food to an already-filled serving dish. Instead, replace nearly empty serving dishes with freshly filled ones. Remember that bacteria from people's hands can contaminate the food. Bacteria will multiply at room temperature.

Discard any perishable foods left out at room temperature for more than two hours, unless the food is kept hot or cold. Whether you are sending leftovers home with guests or saving them for yourself, leftovers should be refrigerated as soon as the guests arrive home and/or within two hours.

Caterers, remember to wash your hands often and thoroughly. This applies whether you are preparing the food in your customer's home, or in your food service facility kitchen*.

A few words about eggs

Some favorite traditional recipes may call for raw or lightly cooked eggs. These may include homemade Caesar salad dressing, ice cream, custards, rice pudding, chocolate mousse, eggnog and some sauces. However, some raw eggs may contain harmful bacteria. Here are some ways to adapt your recipes to help keep your guests safe.

- Add the eggs to the liquid called for in the recipe, then heat the mixture to 160°F.
- Use store-bought products of the foods listed above, which are often already cooked or pasteurized.
- Purchase pasteurized eggs. These can be found in many supermarkets and will be labeled "Pasteurized". You may find them in the refrigerated section, or the frozen food section.

Cooking a holiday roast

Use separate cutting boards, plates, and utensils for raw roasts and cooked roasts to avoid cross-contamination. Wash items such as cutting boards that have touched raw meat with warm water and soap or place them in a dishwasher.

To ensure the juiciest roast this holiday season, use a meat thermometer. Once it has reached the USDA recommended internal temperature of 145°F, the roast is safe to eat. Remember that all cuts of pork, beef, veal, and lamb need a three minute rest period before cutting or consuming.

Transporting food

You may be asked to bring a dish to a gathering of family or friends, or even to the office holiday party. If you plan on contributing a hot item, take it straight from the oven and place in an insulated bag or hot food carrier. If you cannot serve it as soon as you arrive, return it to an oven. Or, you can completely chill it and transport it according to the tips below. Once you arrive, reheat it using a microwave, stove, or oven to 165°F.

Cold items should remain in refrigeration as long as possible. When transporting cold dishes, place them in a cooler with lots of ice or frozen gel packs. A refrigerator thermometer inside the cooler is a good way to ensure the cold food can remain at 40°F or below.

Note: Commercial food service facilities follow the FDA Food Code recommended holding temperatures of 135°F for hot foods and 41°F for cold foods. The USDA recommends the temperatures as noted in this article based upon the fact that home cooking and holding equipment is not as efficient as commercial grade units found in licensed food service facilities.

Sources: www.fsis.usda.gov; www.foodsafety.gov

**To promote good handwashing practices in your commercial food service kitchen, Patco Food Safety recommends TOPfoam TerraGreen Hand Soap, a Green Seal Certified product. Luxury foam disperses and cleans better. Enhanced with aloe vera and Vitamin E for a soft after-feel. Tropical floral fragrance smells clean and fresh.*

Ask the Expert: For any Food Safety or Sanitation questions or concerns, contact Linda Wilt via email - LWilt@bhcinc.com