



NEWS RELEASE

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Food Safety for Winter Parties

Planning a party or potluck to chase away the winter blues. Socializing with family or friends can help make the gray days of winter seem warm and cozy. But before you send out the invitations, check out the following simple steps to safely serve the food.

Bacteria that cause food borne illness multiply rapidly between 40° and 140°F. This is the “Danger Zone.” The main food safety rule for potlucks and parties is to keep perishable foods out of this “Danger Zone.” Keep hot foods hot (above 140°F.) and cold foods cold (below 40°F). Never leave food in the “danger zone” over 2 hours, 1 hour in temperatures above 90° F. What does this mean to your party?

When your neighbor brings the fancy dip, have a bowl of ice ready to keep the dip cold. Have plenty of room in your refrigerator for the salads and deviled eggs. Remember not to overfill the refrigerator. Cool air must circulate to keep the food safe. If there is not enough room in your refrigerator, plan to have coolers or large bowls with ice to keep the cold foods cold.

Those scrumptious casseroles brought to your party hot and steaming should be held hot (at or above 140°F.) either in the oven, on a serving line in heated chafing dishes, or on preheated steam tables, warming trays, and/or slow cookers. Foods that have been cooked ahead and cooled should be reheated to at least 165° F. Sauces, soups, and gravies should be reheated to a boil. Use a food thermometer to check the casseroles in several places to make sure the internal temperature reaches 165°F.

Set up your serving table with bowls of ice to keep cold foods cold and heat sources (chafing dishes, preheated steam tables, warming trays, or slow cookers) to keep hot foods hot. Check the temperature frequently to be sure the food stays at or above 140°F. When the party is over, discard any food left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours. Immediately refrigerate or freeze remaining leftovers in shallow containers.

Chase away the winter blues, stay warm and cozy with friends/family, and fight bacteria with these simple food safety precautions. For more information on keeping food safe, contact your local Cooperative Extension at (209) 468-2085.

Source: USDA FSIS. (March 2001) *Cooking for Groups: A Volunteer's Guide to Food Safety*. Free copies of the guide can be obtained by writing: Federal Consumer Information Center, Item #604 H, Pueblo, CO 81009.