



Keeping Food Safe at Big Events

Every year, hundreds of cases of foodborne illness are reported, many due to unsafe food handling at picnics, church suppers, and camps. Often foodborne illness occurs at these events because cooks are not familiar with how to handle large volumes of food safely. Foodborne illness is nearly 100 percent preventable if safe food-handling practices are followed.

These safe practices also are required if you are preparing food for sale, but more than this, different rules apply. You must follow the *North Carolina Foodservice Regulations*. Contact your local health department for more information. Their regulations may be more stringent than the practices outlined in this publication.

Practicing good personal hygiene

Following the tips below will greatly reduce the chance that harmful bacteria or chemicals will contaminate food.

- Wash your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds before beginning any food preparation. Wash also after returning from the bathroom; after touching dirty surfaces; after using cleaning materials; and after touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Do not dry your hands on cloth towels because they may be a source of contamination. Use paper towels.
- Wear plastic gloves if you have sores, cuts, or scrapes on your hands. These injuries contain bacteria, which could be transferred to the food.
- Never lick cooking utensils or dip your fingers into food to taste it. This could contaminate the food. Instead, use a clean spoon to dip out a portion to taste.
- Restrain your hair by wearing a hair net or pulling it back in a ponytail.
- Do not wear artificial nails or jewelry. The only jewelry that should be worn is a wedding band.

Transporting fresh food safely

When transporting foods from the market or home, store the following items on ice and refrigerate them immediately when you reach your destination:

- Raw meats, fish, and poultry.
- Deli meats.
- Eggs.
- Fruits and vegetables.
- Dairy products.

Fresh foods are highly perishable. Chill them in a refrigerator in waterproof, plastic bags or containers. When transporting them in a non-refrigerated vehicle, completely immerse the food or containers in ice. The following foods may be immersed directly or in plastic bags in ice or icy water: whole, raw fruits and vegetables; cut, raw vegetables, such as celery or carrot sticks or cut potatoes; tofu; and raw chicken or fish. Do not eat ice used to keep foods cold or put it in drinks because it is not safe to consume.

Cut watermelon or cantaloupe is often the cause of foodborne illness resulting from harmful *Salmonella* and *Shigella* bacteria, which can grow unchecked when melons are left at room temperature too long.

Preparing food safely

When preparing foods, there are many opportunities for cross-contamination.

To prevent this:

- Use only equipment, utensils, and surfaces that have been properly cleaned and sanitized. Make a sanitizing solution by adding one tablespoon of unscented bleach to one gallon of warm (not hot) water.
- Store raw meat and poultry separately from foods that will not be cooked or that are ready-to-eat, such as fruits and vegetables and other cooked foods.
- Use separate cutting boards and utensils to prepare raw meats and poultry. This decreases the chance of contaminating foods that are ready-to-eat.

Cooking food safely

Prepare food no more than one day before it will be served—unless it is to be frozen. Never partially cook food, let it sit, and then finish cooking it. This allows bacteria to grow and toxins to form. (Toxins are poisons that some bacteria produce.) Because some toxins are not destroyed by heat, reheating food that has been at unsafe temperatures will not destroy them.

Cook meat and poultry thoroughly to kill harmful bacteria. The only safe way to make sure meat or poultry is cooked well is to use a food thermometer:

- Poultry should be cooked to at least 165°F.
- Ground meat should be cooked to at least 155°F.
- Egg dishes should be cooked to at least 155°F.
- Pork or beef roast should be cooked to at least 145°F.
- Fish should be cooked to at least 145°F.

You can buy a food thermometer at a department store, hardware store, or grocery store for \$5 to \$12. Check this Internet site for details on using a food thermometer: www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/thermy/kitchen.htm.

Serving food safely

When serving food, keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Bacteria grow best in foods that are between 90°F and 100°F, which is lukewarm. During holding, hot foods should be at least 140°F or hotter, while cold foods should be at most 40°F or colder. The best way to maintain these temperatures is to use smaller serving dishes or trays and rotate them often from the oven, stove, or refrigerator.

Using hot plates and ice also is helpful.

Never leave food out for more than two hours. After this, food should be eaten or discarded.

Cleaning and sanitizing

Store dirty utensils, dishware, and cooking equipment in a large covered container. Dirty items attract flies and other insects, which are germ- and disease-carriers. It is best to wash and sanitize these items at another location where a three-compartment sink or a dishwasher is available, as required by *North Carolina Foodservice Regulations*.

Proper garbage removal

- Have several plastic or metal garbage cans with plastic liners and lids available to prevent garbage overflow.
- Arrange access to an industrial-sized garbage receptacle so garbage cans may be emptied frequently.

Remember, foodborne illness is nearly 100 percent preventable—just handle food safely from the time it's bought until it is served.

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