



**KENDALL COUNTY  
HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

# Seasonal Food Safety

## Focus On: Holiday or Party Buffets

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A popular way to celebrate holidays or any party occasion is to invite friends and family to a buffet. However, this type of food service where foods are left out for long periods leaves the door open for uninvited guests -- bacteria that cause food borne illness. Festive times for giving and sharing should not include sharing food borne illness. Here are some tips from the USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline to help you have a SAFE holiday party.

### **Foodborne Bacteria**

Bacteria are everywhere but a few types especially like to crash parties. *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Clostridium perfringens* and *Listeria monocytogenes* frequent people's hands and steam tables. And unlike microorganisms that cause food to spoil, harmful or pathogenic bacteria cannot be smelled or tasted. Prevention is safe food handling. If illness occurs, however, contact a health professional and describe the symptoms.

### ***Staphylococcus aureus***

*Staphylococcus* ("staph") bacteria are found on our skin, in infected cuts and pimples, and in our noses and throats. Improper food handling spreads them. Prevention includes washing hands and utensils before preparing and handling foods and not letting prepared foods -- particularly cooked and cured meats and cheese and meat salads -- sit at room temperature for more than two hours. Thorough cooking destroys "staph" bacteria but staphylococcal enterotoxin is resistant to heat, refrigeration and freezing, and will still cause food borne illness if present.

### ***Clostridium perfringens***

"*Perfringens*" is called the "cafeteria germ" because it may be found in foods served in quantity and left for long periods of time on inadequately maintained steam tables or at room temperature. Prevention is to divide large portions of cooked foods such as beef, turkey, gravy, dressing, stews and casseroles into smaller portions for serving and cooling. Keep cooked foods hot (135°F) or cold (41°F), not lukewarm.

### ***Listeria monocytogenes***

Because *Listeria* bacteria multiply (although slowly) at refrigeration temperatures, these bacteria can be found in cold foods typically served on buffets. To avoid serving foods containing *Listeria*, follow "keep refrigerated" label directions and carefully observe "sell by" and "use by" dates on processed products, and

thoroughly reheat frozen or refrigerated processed meat and poultry products before consumption.

### **Safe Food Handling**

Always wash your hands before and after handling food. Keep your kitchen, dishes, and utensils clean also. Always serve food on clean plates -- not those previously holding raw meat and poultry. Otherwise, bacteria, which may have been present in raw meat juices, can cross contaminate the food to be served.

### **Cook Thoroughly**

If you are cooking foods ahead of time for your party be sure to cook foods thoroughly to safe temperatures. Cook fresh roast beef, veal, and lamb to at least 145°F for medium rare and 160°F for medium doneness. Bake whole poultry to 180°F, poultry breasts to 170°F. Ground turkey and poultry should be cooked to 165°F. All other meat, fish and ground red meats should be cooked to 160°F.

### **Use Shallow Containers**

Divide cooked foods into shallow containers to store in the refrigerator or freezer until serving. This encourages rapid, even cooling. Reheat hot foods to 165°F. Arrange and serve food on several small platters rather than on one large platter. Keep the rest of the food hot in the oven (set at 200 - 250°F) or cold in the refrigerator until serving time. This way food will be held at a safe temperature for a longer period of time. REPLACE empty platters rather than adding fresh food to a dish that already had food in it. Many people's hands may have been taking food from the dish, which has also been sitting out at room temperature.

### **The Two-Hour Rule**

Foods should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours. Keep track of how long foods have been sitting on the buffet table and discard anything there two hours or more.

### **Keep Hot Foods HOT And Cold Foods COLD**

Hot foods should be held at 135°F or warmer. On the buffet table you can keep hot foods hot with chafing dishes, slow cookers, and warming trays. Cold foods should be held at 41°F or colder. Keep foods cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice. Otherwise, use small serving trays and replace them when empty.

For more information, please contact the Environmental Health Unit  
of the Kendall County Health Department at (630) 553-9100 ext. 8026.

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