

HOLIDAY POTLUCK SUCCESS



Potluck dinners can be fun or they can be hazardous to your health. At a potluck, food is often prepared hours before the event, not stored at the proper temperature and handled by many people...people who can spread germs through their hands, hair, coughing or sneezing. The result? Possible food poisoning. Prevent foodborne illness by following these rules:

- Cook foods thoroughly.
- Avoid serving low-acid foods, such as creamed dishes, meatballs, beef stew, fish dishes, chicken a la king or cream-filled pies/pastries.
- Reduce time between preparing, cooking and serving foods. Prepare food the same day as the potluck, if possible, only a few hours before serving. If foods have eggs, dairy products, meat or poultry, they should be served within three hours of preparation.
- Refrigerate food in small quantities using shallow pans if you must store food overnight.
- Keep hot food HOT (above 135°F) and cold food COLD (below 41°F) before and during serving. Use a barbecue, Coleman stove or Sterno to keep food HOT. Use cold packs or ice to keep food COLD.
- Use disposable forks, knives, spoons, glasses and plates. Throw disposables away — do not try to wash them! Try to set up the forks, knives and spoons so the guests can pick them up by the handle.
- Line garbage containers with plastic bags to make throwing out the trash easier.
- Keep menu simple; avoid fancy food combinations.
- Do not use any home-canned foods. Home-frozen foods are acceptable.
- Sugar or sweeteners should be served in closed containers or single packets. Use only squeeze or pump bottles for ketchup or mustard, and individual packets for relish, mayonnaise, etc.
- When possible, use chilled ingredients to prepare foods that will be served cold.
- Cover food to prevent contamination by insects, flies, dust or humans.
- Foods safe to prepare at home include fruit pies, bread products, plain cakes, fruit salads, and tossed vegetable salads, including coleslaw with lemon juice/vinegar based dressing. Punches, fruit juices and similar beverages are safe if kept in glass or plastic containers. Do not use aluminum containers, which could release metals into foods.
- Throw leftovers away. The food has been handled by many people and is probably contaminated.

Keep hot food *HOT!* Keep cold food *COLD!* Keep food *CLEAN!*