

# Food Safety and You:

## POTLUCK SAFETY



Potluck meals offer a great opportunity to share your recipes, cooking expertise and great food with friends and family. No matter what dish you cook for a potluck — or if you simply purchase a pre-made dish from a store — time and temperature abuse can lead to foodborne illnesses.

### What is time and temperature abuse?

Temperature and time are the most important factors for controlling the growth of foodborne bacteria. The temperature danger zone is between 40 degrees and 140 degrees.

The longer food is in the temperature danger zone, the more time pathogens have to grow.

### Why are potluck foods at greater risk?

Even if all the food is prepared safely, potluck meals may pose a higher risk for foodborne illness. Potluck meals have a higher likelihood of time and temperature abuse because of these important factors:

- Foods travel for a longer distance compared to eating at home.
- Foods are left out for a longer time compared to eating at home.

If foods are left in the temperature danger zone during long travel or waiting times, then there is an increased opportunity for foodborne bacteria to grow and cause illness.



### To prevent temperature abuse and reduce the risk of foodborne illness, keep hot food hot and cold food cold all the time!

These guidelines help keep your potluck dishes at a safe temperature.

#### Transporting food

- Keep hot food at or above 140 degrees by wrapping the food well and placing it in an insulated container.
- Keep cold food at or below 40 degrees by placing the food in a cooler with ice or frozen gel packs.
- Minimize stops and delays between home and your destination.

#### Reheating hot food

- If your food needs to be reheated after you reach your destination, make sure to reheat it to 165 degrees or higher. Sauces, soups and gravies should be brought to a boil.



## Displaying hot and cold food

- Hot foods should be kept on a heat source, such as chafing dishes, preheated steam tables, warming trays or slow cookers.
- Cold foods should be placed in containers over ice.

## Saving food for leftovers

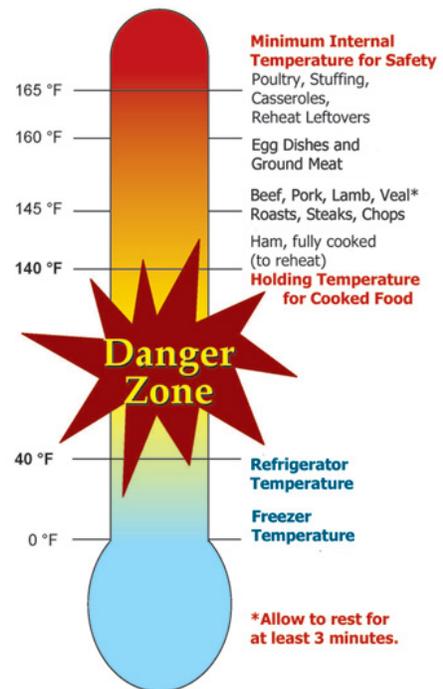
- After the event, place leftovers in shallow containers and refrigerate or freeze them immediately.
- Discard food left out at room temperature for more than two hours. Discard food left out for one hour when the temperature is above 90 degrees.
- When in doubt, throw it out!

## Cited resources:

United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service. 2013. Holiday or Party Buffets. [https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/seasonal-food-safety/holiday-or-party-buffets/ct\\_index](https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/seasonal-food-safety/holiday-or-party-buffets/ct_index)

United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service. 2015. 7 Food Safety Steps for Successful Community Meals. <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/7-steps-community-meals/7-steps-community-meals>

United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service. 2001. Cooking for Groups: A Volunteer's Guide to Food Safety. [https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/cooking-for-groups-a-volunteers-guide-to-food-safety/ct\\_index1](https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/cooking-for-groups-a-volunteers-guide-to-food-safety/ct_index1)



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