



Cooperative Extension Service

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Holiday Food Safety

The holidays are a wonderful time to share food gifts and potluck dinners with friends and family alike. While these are certainly heartwarming traditions they also bring with them an increased possibility of contracting a foodborne illness. Most cases of foodborne illness are caused by unsafe handling of food—a cause that is easily preventable. Here are a few temperature tips to help make your holiday a safe, healthy, and happy one:

Cold foods should be kept below 40° F, no small feat if you've got a holiday party with a table-full of foods to contend with. Double-walled, insulated bowls or insulated casserole dishes can also lend a hand. If you can't round up any of these another good trick is to set smaller bowls into larger bowls or containers filled with ice. Be sure to monitor these and refresh the ice whenever necessary. Feeling crafty? You can try to make an ice bucket out of a hollowed-out pumpkin or watermelon. It is a good idea to line these with a bowl or food-safe plastic bag to avoid a mess when the ice starts to melt.

Hot foods are just as temperature-sensitive, and should be kept above 135° F. As most of us know, crock pots and electric skillets and roasters will help with this duty. Even coolers (if not being used for cold foods) can help keep things warm. Line them with towels and oven-warmed bricks to create a well-insulated heat source for your foods.

Whether the food should be kept hot or cold, using smaller containers to serve with can help minimize the amount of food sitting at room temperature—though this will certainly require a little more attention and more frequent re-fills. Keep your re-fills on hand in the refrigerator or a warm oven.

Remember, food should only be left out in the 'danger zone' (40° -135°) for two hours before being cooled, reheated (to 165° F), or discarded. This will help to keep illness-causing bacteria from making your food a happy home. These tips (and more!) can be found on at www.holidayfoodsafety.org. Feel free to visit the website for further tips on holiday food safety, activities, recipes, videos and more. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Northeast Wyoming. He can be reached via email at kwillis3@uwyo.edu.*