

Food Safety Steps for Successful Community Meals

Whether preparing food for a family reunion or a community gathering, safe food handling can prevent foodborne illness. Follow these steps for a safe and successful event!

Plan Ahead — Make sure the location meets your needs.

- Be sure you have enough oven, stovetop, refrigerator, freezer, and work space.
- Find out if there's a source of clean water. If not, bring water for preparation and cleaning.

Purchase or provide foods from safe sources.

- Buy food from local grocery stores or farmers markets.
- Do not use home canned products. Instead use commercially canned and processed items in your recipes.

Store & Prepare Food Safely

- Refrigerate or freeze perishable food within 2 hours of shopping or preparing; 1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F.
- Wash hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers, or handling pets.
- Never thaw foods at room temperature. Thaw in a refrigerator and cook immediately.
- Keep raw foods separate from cooked foods during storage, preparation and serving.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and work surfaces frequently with hot, soapy water.

Cook Food to Safe Minimum Internal Temperatures

- Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of meat, poultry, casseroles, and other food.
- Never partially cook food for finishing later because you increase the risk of bacterial growth.

Transport Food Safely — Keep hot food HOT. Keep cold food COLD.

- Keep hot food at or above 140 °F. Wrap well and place in an insulated container.
- Keep cold food at or below 40 °F. Place in a cooler with ice or frozen gel packs.

Need to Reheat? Food must be hot and steamy for serving.

- Use the stove, oven, or microwave to reheat food to 165 °F. Bring sauces, soups, and gravies to a boil.

Keep Food Out of the "Danger Zone" (40-140 °F).

- Keep hot food hot - at or above 140 °F. Place cooked food in chafing dishes, preheated steam tables, warming trays, and/or slow cookers.
- Keep cold food cold — at or below 40 °F. Place food in containers on ice.

When In Doubt, Throw it Out!

- Discard food left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours; 1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F.
- Place leftovers in shallow containers. Refrigerate or freeze immediately.