

Potluck Food Safety Tips

Everyone looks forward to them. All the tasty treats laid out in a beautiful spread from savory side dishes to decadent desserts. It could be for somebody's birthday, a holiday party, or an International Day event. Potlucks are a hit because you get to try all kinds of delicious foods, and you only have to bring one dish to share! Therein lurks the hidden danger. With so many people preparing so many different foods, everyone needs to do their part to help prevent a foodborne illness outbreak. Here are a few food safety tips that can help make sure that your next potluck only leaves everyone feeling stuffed and happy.

Proper Handwashing

The number one way that foodborne illnesses are spread is from people contaminating their hands, and then not washing their hands before they handle food. Proper handwashing involves using soap and warm water, and scrubbing your hands together for at least 10-15 seconds. Make sure that you wash your hands before you prepare or serve food for a potluck. Also make sure you wash your hands after:

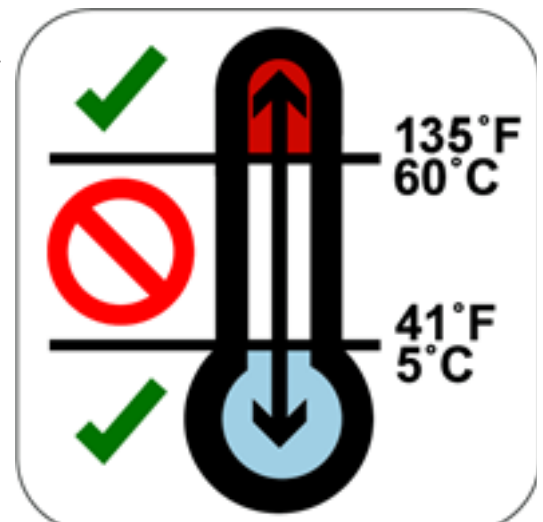
- Using the restroom
- Handling raw meats or eggs
- Touching your hair or face
- Sneezing or coughing
- Touching anything else that may contaminate your hands



Time & Temperature

Time and temperature go hand in hand when it comes to food safety. You have to control both to make sure that food stays safe. When preparing or serving food for a potluck, make sure that you:

- Keep food refrigerated at or below 41°F until it is ready to be served.
- Make sure that perishable foods are not left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours, or more than 1 hour if you're outdoors on a hot day.
- If possible, keep cold perishable foods on ice while they're being served to keep them cold.
- Keep hot foods at 135°F or hotter in a crock pot or some other type of warmer during the potluck.
- Refrigerate leftovers as soon as possible if you plan to keep them.



Cooking and Cross-Contamination

When preparing foods with raw ingredients, like raw meat or raw eggs, it's critical to handle these foods with care. When preparing raw foods, take care to ensure that raw foods and ready-to-eat foods are always kept separated to prevent cross-contamination. Getting raw meat juice or raw egg on other foods is a sure way to get someone sick. Try to use separate cutting boards and separate utensils when you are preparing raw foods. If you don't have any available, make sure that you prepare the ready-to-eat foods first, or at least wash, rinse, and sanitize the utensils that came into contact with the raw foods. Using a probe thermometer, ensure that all raw foods are thoroughly cooked to ensure that all bacteria in these foods are killed:

- Eggs, fish, and whole pieces of meat including beef, lamb, and pork – 145°F
- Ground up meats like sausages or hamburgers – 155°F
- Poultry like chicken or turkey, and foods that are stuffed – 165°F



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Personal Health

We've all been there. We committed to bringing a dish to the potluck but we don't even want to go ourselves because we're sick. In fact, it was difficult to get away from the bathroom long enough just to be able to prepare the dish at all. If you ever find yourself in this situation, DO NOT prepare food for the potluck. Trust us on this one. Everyone else would rather miss out on the food you planned to bring than risk a foodborne illness outbreak. When someone preparing food is sick with an acute gastro-intestinal illness, it is very likely that they could unintentionally contaminate the food and spread their illness to all who eat it.

Do not prepare food for other people if you are experiencing either of the following symptoms:

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting along with fever and abdominal cramps



When you know that the food you brought to the potluck was prepared safely, you will feel even better about sharing it with everyone. For more food safety tips, visit www.ocfoodinfo.com.



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