



# 12 Food Safety Guidelines *of the holidays*

On the 12th day of Christmas, my family gave to me ... food poisoning? That's one gift you don't want, but holiday party potluck tables can be a hot spot for bacteria such as *Salmonella*. Fortunately, there are lots of ways to help keep everyone safe from foodborne illness and still enjoy the potluck offerings, which are often the signature attraction of holiday gatherings.

- 1 Save cold stuff for last:** When grocery shopping for your ingredients, add refrigerated and frozen foods to your cart last so that their temperatures do not drop to an unsafe, bacteria-breeding level before you get home. When you arrive home, put away groceries immediately.
- 2 Go beyond surface cleaning:** Sanitize food surfaces like cutting boards and utensils before and after use. Sanitizing means to reduce the number of germs to a safer level. You can make your own sanitizer with 1 teaspoon of unscented bleach mixed in 1 gallon of water.
- 3 Wash, rinse, repeat:** Germs from hands not washed often or thoroughly enough are the No. 1 cause of foodborne illnesses. Always wash your hands before preparing a potluck dish, and any-time in between when you have use the restroom, change a diaper, care for pets, sneeze – you get the idea. Scrub with soap for at least 20 seconds before rinsing, and use a clean paper towel to dry.
- 4 Keep meat separate:** When preparing food for parties, make sure you keep raw meat separate from ready-to-eat foods at all times – in the grocery cart, in the refrigerator, and on a separate cutting board or other prep surface. Even a drop of juice from raw meat can cross-contaminate, or spread bacteria to, other foods.
- 5 Don't skimp on the temp:** Always cook meat to the recommended temperature – the required temperature depends on the type and cut of meat or poultry. Follow the temperature chart on the next page and use a meat thermometer to ensure the dish you worked hard on is safe to consume.
- 6 Divide it up:** If you cook your dish ahead of time, divide large portions into smaller, shallow containers that will fit in the refrigerator. This helps food cool quickly so that bacteria doesn't have time to grow.





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**Don't pass it on:** If you or anyone in your household has been sick with vomiting or diarrhea the week of the party, don't prepare a potluck dish. Viral bacteria can spread easily through your house and contaminate your kitchen surfaces.

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**Keep foods hot:** Once cooked, meat, eggs, and foods containing dairy products must be kept at 140 degrees F or hotter to keep bacteria from growing. You can use a Crock Pot or a chafing dish to keep your food hot and safe to serve to other guests.

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**Make it a quick trip:** The longer a prepared dish travels to your gathering, the more opportunities there are for bacteria to multiply. Don't make lots of stops, and if you're going to be driving more than about 15 minutes, consider packing cold foods in ice. Remember, the dish can only sit out for two hours once it's prepared.

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**Wrap it up:** If you are traveling a long distance with a hot dish, wrap it up with aluminum foil or even newspaper to keep it insulated.

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**Follow the 2-hour rule:** Some popular party foods aren't meant to be hot, even though they contain potentially hazardous foods (PHFs). (PHFs include meat; eggs; dairy; cut melon; and cooked beans, potatoes, pasta, and rice). So what should you do about your cold dip, cheese tray, or chocolate pie, for instance? These foods, along with any others that can't be kept hot or cold, should be thrown away after sitting out for two hours.

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**Enjoy your leftovers – carefully:** Only keep leftovers from your potluck dish if they were properly held hot or cold during the party. Refrigerate immediately upon arriving home, and reheat rapidly to 165 degrees F before consuming.

