



NEWS RELEASE

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Keeping Food Safe

Buffet Basics

Buffets are a great way to celebrate special occasions. What could be more tempting than a buffet table laden with a mouth-watering feast? But when foods are left out at room temperature for long periods of time, buffets can provide an inviting environment for bacteria. Here's how you can keep bacteria away from your buffet table.

Size Matters! If you're planning a buffet at home and are not sure how quickly the food will be eaten, keep buffet portions small. Prepare a number of small platters and dishes ahead of time. Store cold back-up dishes in the refrigerator and keep hot dishes in the oven (set at 200 - 250°F) prior to serving. This way, your late-arriving guests can enjoy the same appetizing arrangements as the early arrivals.

Take Temperatures! Cooked, hot foods should be kept at 140°F or warmer. Use a food thermometer to check. Serve or keep food hot in chafing dishes, crock pots, and warming trays. Note: Some warmers only hold food at 110°F to 120°F, so make sure your warmer has the capability to hold foods at 140°F or warmer.

Chill Out! Cold foods should be kept at 40°F or colder. Keep cold foods refrigerated until serving time. If food is going to stay out on the buffet table longer than 2 hours, place plates of cold food on ice to retain the chill.

Keep It Fresh! It can be unsafe to add new food to a serving dish that already contained food. Many people's hands may have touched food, which has also been sitting at room temperature for awhile. Instead, replace empty platters with freshly filled ones.

Watch the Clock! Don't leave perishable food out at room temperature on a buffet table for more than 2 hours unless you're keeping it hot or cold. If the buffet is held in a place where the temperature is above 90°F, the safe-holding time is reduced to 1 hour.

If you have any questions or concerns about food safety during the holiday season, contact: The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at (800) 535-4555 or log onto the Fight BAC[®] website at www.fightbac.org.

Source: Partnership for Food Safety Education (October 2000). "Buffet Bonanza: Keeping Food Safe!"
Online at www.fightbac.org/pdf/holiday_buffet1.pdf