



Community Spirit

Cooking For Groups: How To Keep Food Safe

(NAPS)—Whether preparing food for a family reunion or a community gathering, people who are great cooks at home don't necessarily know how to safely prepare and store large quantities of food for large groups. Food that is mishandled can cause foodborne illness. However, by following some simple steps, volunteer cooks can make the event safe and successful!

1. 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.

2. Store and Prepare Food Safely.

- Refrigerate or freeze perishable food within 2 hours of shopping or preparing.
- Find separate preparation areas in the work space for raw and cooked food.
- Never place cooked food back on the same plate or cutting board that held raw food.
- Wash hands, cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and work surfaces frequently with hot, soapy water.

3. Cook Food to Safe Internal Temperatures—It's the only way to tell if harmful bacteria are destroyed!

- Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of meat, poultry, egg dishes, casseroles, and other food.
- Check temperature in several places to be sure food is safely cooked.
- Never partially cook food for finishing later because you increase the risk of bacterial growth.

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

- Keep cold food at or below 40°F. Place in a cooler with a cold source such as ice or commercial freezing gels.



Keep hot food hot and cold food cold.

- Keep hot food at or above 140°F. Wrap well and place in an insulated container.

5. Need to Reheat?—Food must be hot and steamy for serving. Just “warmed up” is not good enough.

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

6. Keep Food Out of the “Danger Zone” (40°F-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.

7. When In Doubt, Throw It Out!

- Discard food left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours.
- Place leftovers in shallow containers. Refrigerate or freeze immediately.

For a copy of *Cooking for Groups: A Volunteer's Guide to Food Safety*, write: FCIC, Item #604H, Pueblo, CO 81009.

For more food safety information, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555; for the hearing impaired 1-800-256-7072 (TTY); www.fsis.usda.gov.