

There are many special occasions when we like to gather together a large group of people and celebrate. Everything from holiday festivities, to birthdays, graduations or just neighbourhood parties will no doubt involve volumes of delectable food. If proper care is not taken to keep the food safe, the good times could end with family and friends becoming sick from a food borne illness.

The most important fact in food safety is to “Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.” Having large amounts of food prepared by the host or brought by guests could put stress on the home kitchen as it is essentially designed to prepare food for a family of six.

Plan Ahead

- Sweets and breads can be prepared before the day of the party and do not require refrigeration.
- Other foods, such as casseroles, can be prepared in advance providing they are cooled or frozen quickly. Large volumes can be cooled faster by putting foods in shallow dishes. Large containers of hot food can be placed in a container of ice or cold water for rapid cooling.
- Meats and poultry that are cooked one or two days before should be sliced while still hot and placed in shallow pans, no more than two inches deep and then put into the refrigerator to cool. Do not fully cover the food until it has reached 4°C (40°F).

Preparing and Cooking

- Always wash your hands before preparing food.
- When preparing food ahead of time, cook to a safe internal temperature.
- Keep raw meats separate from cooked and ready-to-eat foods to prevent cross contamination.
- Refrigerate cut or peeled fruit as bacteria is able to grow on the cut surface.
- Cooked vegetables must be kept hot or cold.

- Wash all raw produce under running water while using friction or a produce brush.
- Clean and sanitize (1 to 2 teaspoons of household bleach in 1 litre of water) all work surfaces that have come in contact with raw meats.

The Day of the Party

- Make room in your refrigerator for the additional food being brought by your guests. Try not to overload the refrigerator, as the cold air must be able to circulate in order to keep the food cold. If you are running out of room, some foods can be taken out and left at room temperature. These foods are uncut fruits and vegetables, jams, condiments such as mustard and pickles, and beverages other than milk. Insulated coolers containing ice or ice packs can be used to keep food cold as well.
- Hot foods brought by guests should either be kept hot in the oven at 60°C (140°F) or served shortly after their arrival.
- Be sure that raw meats or poultry are stored in sealed, leak-proof containers on the lowest rack of the refrigerator to avoid the risk of cross contamination to the cooked or ready-to-eat foods.

Serving Safe Food

- Hot foods must be kept at or above 60°C (140°F) and cold foods kept at or below 4°C (40°F) when being served.
- Food should not remain in the temperature Danger Zone, between 4°C and 60°C (40°F – 140°F), for longer than two hours. If the food is to be left out for more than two hours, or the room in which it is being served becomes very warm, the food can be kept hot by using crock pots or warming trays or kept cold by using ice or ice-packs around the dish.
- Label the sauces and dressings in order to discourage tasting.

- Provide tongs and long-handled ladles to prevent guests from touching food with their hands or dirty utensils.
- Do not leave perishable finger foods like soft cheeses, dips or spreads at room temperature for too long.
- Divide into small portions and replenish as required.

Saving Leftovers

- If perishable food has been in the danger zone for less than two hours it can be quickly cooled then refrigerated or taken home by the guests.
- When taking leftovers home use ice packs or insulated containers or wraps to maintain the temperature at 4°C (40°F) or lower.

Reheating Foods

- Cooked foods or leftovers that are to be reheated must be heated to at least 74° C (165° F). The temperature should be checked using a thermometer.
- Soups, sauces and gravies should be reheated to a rolling boil.

FightBac©

There are four simple rules for food safety that will help ensure an enjoyable celebration:

- CLEAN:** wash hands, utensils and surfaces often to keep everything clean and free of bacteria
- SEPARATE:** keep foods separate to avoid cross contamination
- COOK:** cook to proper temperatures
- CHILL:** refrigerate foods promptly



For further information on food safety visit the
Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture
Food Safety website at
<http://novascotia.ca/agri/>