

Plan Now for Safe Holidays

In case you haven't noticed, here comes the holiday season sneaking up on us again. It's time for bake sales, office parties, church dinners, and open houses. Make your plans now, so that food poisoning bacteria don't sneak into the goodies!

For bake sales, two things to remember: The fewer hands touch the food, the safer it will be. So even though it takes time, wrap the brownies and cupcakes individually. Package 2-6 cookies to a bag, and sell them by the bag. Secondly, avoid any milk and egg based pies or cake fillings. Pumpkin, custard, chocolate, lemon, even peanut butter pies made with a custard base are too risky to put out on a sales table.

Holiday meals can be tricky too, especially when you are serving large numbers of people. For safety's sake, invest in a food thermometer, and use it. If you do a lot of entertaining and don't have chafing dishes or crock pots, consider getting some. The first rule of safe food handling is to **KEEP HOT FOODS HOT**. Hot means over 140°F. So plan ahead on how you will keep all the food hot long enough for everyone to be served. It's smart to keep the food hot on the stove and replenish the serving dishes frequently.

The flip side of the rule is **KEEP COLD FOODS COLD**. Cold means under 40°F. It's a little easier to keep things cold. Set the serving dishes in a larger dish filled with ice. Or freeze the two dishes with water in between. But again, use the thermometer to keep tabs on the serving table. Anything that is not hot enough or cold enough for more than 2 hours needs to be thrown away.

Finally, figure out how many people can easily fit in the kitchen, and limit it to that. It's a lot easier to **KEEP THINGS CLEAN AND SEPARATE** if there are only a few cooks. Beg, borrow or buy enough utensils that you have a separate spoon or knife for each task. Sharing is great for the holiday, but not sharing food poisoning.