

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Good Memories for the Holidays

The last thing you need to spoil the holidays is food poisoning! If you're expecting a houseful of family, or helping organize the church dinner, keep food safety in mind. It's simple really. There are only 4 steps to safe food handling. 1. Keep Hot foods Hot. 2. Keep Cold foods Cold. 3. Keep Raw and Cooked foods Separate. And 4. Keep Everything Clean! The most important utensil you'll need is a food thermometer. If you don't have one, get one. When you have one, use it, please!

Keeping hot foods hot is really important for casseroles, mixed dishes and meat. Many food poisoning bacteria prefer foods with lots of protein (meat, eggs and milk) or with a mixture of protein and starch. Those are things like the green bean casserole with a creamy, cheesy sauce and the egg, bread and sausage dish for Sunday brunch.

If you will be serving any of these foods, figure out how to keep them hot. Unless they stay hotter than 135° F they will have to be thrown away after 2 hours. Use that thermometer to be sure it's hot enough, in the middle of the dish. You can use a buffet serving dish that has a heat source such as canned heat (like Sterno®), or an electric one. Slow cookers work well set on low. If there is no way to keep things hot on the serving table, set out small amounts and keep the rest hot in the kitchen. When the dish is empty put out another one with a fresh supply. Or, put a label on the dish with the time you took it out of the oven. After 2 hours, throw any leftovers away.

Things that must be kept cold include all those delicious creamy pies. Custard,

chocolate, lemon and yes, pumpkin pies must be refrigerated for safety. Any pie that has eggs and milk in the filling is a possible home for happy, hungry bacteria. Plain fruit pies are usually acidic enough and have enough sugar to be safe. But pies, cobblers, cakes or other home-made goodies made with artificial sweeteners must be refrigerated too. Without the sugar, they've lost their preservative.

Another common holiday item that didn't use to be on the 'keep refrigerated' list is fruit salad! There have been enough outbreaks of food poisoning from cut fresh fruit that FDA now counts them as potentially hazardous foods. Serve these like the hot foods, with just enough on the table at one time to be used quickly. Or get two serving bowls, one about 2-3 inches bigger across than the other. Put a layer of crushed ice in the larger one, then nestle the smaller one into the ice and fill it with fruit salad.

For pot luck church dinners, or if you have a lot of eager kitchen helpers, try to divide the space. If you can keep all the meat dishes in one area, the baked goods in another and the raw veggies in a third area, there will be less chance for bacteria to move from one food to another. Try to keep things separated in the refrigerator too. Put baked goods on the top shelf, veggies and fruits in the middle, and meats on the bottom. That way you won't have meat or turkey juices dripping onto other foods.

Finally, wash, wash, wash! Washing your hands is **the** most effective way to stop the spread of bacteria. Wash hands, knives, cutting boards and any other utensils every time you change from one food to another. First take off your rings and jewelry. Bacteria love to hide under them! Scrub your hands, including up the wrist and between the fingers, with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse and dry with a clean paper towel. Every time you change foods or touch something that is not food

(the phone, your hair, the puppy), stop and wash your hands again. Be clean!

Yes, these guidelines might sound like a lot of bother, but how much bother is a trip to the doctor or emergency room? Not fun! And the more you practice keeping food safe, the easier it becomes.

Here's an easy weeknight dinner to keep the family happy. Use mild or hot salsa, whichever you like. Don't overcook the cheese or it will get tough.

South of the Border Spaghetti Pie

8 oz dry spaghetti, or 4 cups cooked spaghetti	1 egg
8 oz very lean ground beef or turkey	½ C chopped green pepper
½ C shredded low fat cheddar or Mexican blend cheese	1 C salsa
chopped tomatoes and cilantro, optional	1 C whole kernel corn

Preheat oven to 350° F. Coat a 9 inch deep dish pie pan with cooking spray. Cook spaghetti. Fry ground beef and pepper until meat is brown. Break up large chunks of meat. Drain off fat. Drain corn if using canned corn. Stir corn and salsa into meat and heat. Mix egg into spaghetti. Put spaghetti into pie pan and pat down to make a crust. Top with meat mixture. Bake 25 to 30 minutes, until hot through. Sprinkle with cheese. Let stand until cheese softens. Top with tomatoes and cilantro if desired. Serves 4.

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