

SOLUTIONS
for your LIFE

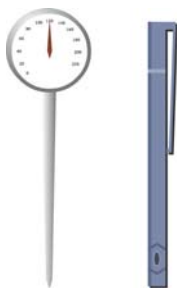
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Safe Food Handling Around the Holidays

With families gathering, churches celebrating and all the office parties occurring, the holidays are the time for lots of fun. Unfortunately they can also be the time for more food borne illness as well. There's more food sitting out, more leftover food to be taken care of, more different people handling foods, not enough space in the refrigerator for all the food, and plenty of bacteria around waiting for a chance to grow on any of it! The good news is that there are just 4 basic rules of safe food handling that will protect you and your loved ones from food poisoning.

- 1. Keep hot foods HOT.**
- 2. Keep cold foods COLD.**
- 3. Keep foods SEPARATE.**
- 4. Keep things CLEAN.**

If you don't all ready have a **food thermometer** in the house, please go buy one! Don't wait for Santa to bring you one, it might be too late. They are the only reliable way to know if your food is cooked



enough and if it is hot or cold enough to be kept safely.

Hot Foods

Whether you're serving the meal or offering a buffet, if it's meat and potatoes or just appetizers, **hot foods must be kept above 140° F.** Otherwise they must be thrown away within 2 hours. Use chafing dishes or hot plates to keep hot meats and vegetables at or above 140° F on the serving table. If not, put food out in small amounts and write the time on the underside of the plate. Keep the majority of the food in a warm oven, a slow cooker, rice steamer or other heating utensil. Use the thermometer to be sure it's keeping the food hotter than 140° F. After the food has been at room temperature for 2 hours, throw it away. Do not add more hot food to a cool dish. Bacteria growing in the cool dish will just contaminate the fresh food!

Cold Foods

Cold foods must be kept below 40° F to prevent bacterial growth. If there's not enough room in the refrigerator keep a

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large cooler or two with enough ice to hold the foods and keep them cold. You can make coolers by filling a larger bowl or dish with crushed ice and nesting a smaller one with the food into the ice. As with the hot foods, if cold foods are out for more than 2 hours without ice or temperature control, they should be thrown away. Use that thermometer to check, and don't be afraid to throw warm food away.

Foods that need to be kept cold include boiled or deviled eggs, cut fruits and salads, cream or custard-based pies and cream or custard-filled desserts as well as the usual meats.

Separation

Cooked foods should be kept separate from raw foods. Do not allow juices from raw meats, seafood or poultry to drip onto vegetables or fruits, or onto cutting boards or countertops where the raw foods will be handled.

If possible, use 2 separate cutting boards, one for fruits and vegetables, the other for meats and seafood. Wash cutting boards, knives, and all other utensils in hot soapy water and rinse well after each use.

Even though refrigerators tend to full this time of year, be careful about where the food is placed. Keep baked goods on the upper shelves, vegetables and fruits in the center unless they're protected in their own drawers, and keep meats on the bottom. That way juices from the meats can't drip onto other foods and contaminate them.

Keep It Clean

The first and most important things to keep clean are hands! Wash hands before handling food, every time you change from one food to another, and after touching pets,

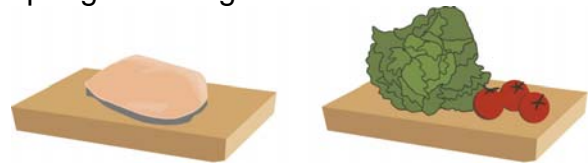


cigarettes or any other potentially contaminated item.

Wash counters and tabletops before putting food on them. Wash dishes, pans and utensils after using with one food and before using with another.

A mixture of 1 tablespoon of bleach in a gallon of water, in a spray bottle, can be used to sanitize clean surfaces. The surface must be washed and rinsed before the bleach can be effective.

If you use sponges for cleaning, be sure to clean them. You can heat a wet sponge on High in the microwave for



one minute, or boil it for one minute to destroy bacteria.

Cooking Temperatures

Using a thermometer to check the temperature of cooking foods not only insures that they are cooked enough to kill bacteria but avoids the over-cooking that leads to dry, tough meats and soft, soggy vegetables.

Safe Internal Temperatures for Cooked Foods

Poultry - whole or pieces	165° F
Stuffing, all stuffed foods	165° F
Reheated leftovers	165° F
Pork	160° F
Ground meats	160° F
Eggs, egg dishes	160° F
Beef, Veal, Lamb	145° F
Vegetables	145° F