

SHARE article  
November, 2008

Mary A. Keith, PhD, LD/N  
Hillsborough County Extension Agent  
(813) 744-5519, ext. 136  
email: [makeith@mail.ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:makeith@mail.ifas.ufl.edu)

### Keep Holiday Foods Safe

It would be a shame to ruin the holidays with food poisoning, wouldn't it? That's not what you want to remember next year! So keep food safety in mind as you plan meals or parties at home or at church, school or work. There are just four basic rules: Keep cold foods cold, Keep hot foods hot, Keep raw and cooked foods separate, and Keep everything clean. Here are some particular things to remember.

Any pies that contain milk or eggs need to be kept refrigerated. That includes all types of custard pies, chocolate or pumpkin pies and cheesecakes. The milk and eggs make them good food for hungry bacteria. Make sure you have room in the refrigerator to store them safely.

Quiches, strata and baked egg dishes for brunch are also in this category. Despite all the popular recipes for preparing them the night before, the USDA does not recommend this. Mixed dishes containing eggs should be baked when they are prepared, not stored overnight before baking. Even though they will be baked, eggs and milk will be good food for bacteria to grow on. Some bacteria leave toxins behind when they grow.

Fruit salads and most cut fruit are now on the risky list. There have been several big outbreaks of food poisoning due to fruit salads or cut fruits being left on the table instead of being refrigerated. If you will have a (nice, healthy!) fruit salad on a buffet table, put it out a little at a time. No part of it should be at room temperature for more than 2 hours. If that is not possible, get a large bowl, at least 2 or 3 inches wider than the serving bowl. Put a layer of crushed ice in the bigger bowl then nestle the serving bowl down into the ice. Refill the ice as often as necessary to keep the fruit cold.

Keep hot dishes hot enough to prevent bacterial growth too. Hot casseroles and sliced

meats need to stay hotter than 135° F to be safe. If you're not sure they are at least that hot (use a thermometer to be sure), then put a sticker on them with the time on it. Throw them away after 2 hours. You can use a server that uses canned heat (like Sterno®) to keep them hot, or an electric serving dish. Crock pots and slow cookers are great for keeping food safely hot enough too. Set them on low.

If you're organizing the church holiday meal, try to divide the work space so that all meat dishes are kept in one space, vegetables in another and baked goods in another. Divide the refrigerator space that way too if you can. Put baked goods on the top shelf, cooked vegetables next, then raw veggies, and finally meats on the bottom. Keeping things separated will help prevent spreading bacteria from one food to another.

Finally, wash, wash, wash. Wash your hands, knives, cutting boards and other utensils every time you change from one food to another. Keep soap and paper towels handy for all kitchen helpers too, so that they don't have any excuses for not washing. Scrub hands for 20 seconds with soap, then rinse with running water and dry on a clean towel.

Follow these 4 rules and you'll have a memorably safe holiday season.

*Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.*

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is an Equal Employment Opportunity - Affirmative Action Employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, sex, age, handicap or national origin. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION IN AGRICULTURE, HOME ECONOMICS, STATE OF FLORIDA, IFAS, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AND BOARDS OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COOPERATING