



Food Safety for Group Functions



Food that is mishandled can cause very serious illnesses for those who consume it. This is especially true for at-risk groups such as infants and young children, older adults, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems. That's why it's important that volunteers be especially careful when preparing and serving food to large groups regardless of the situation – receptions, parties, funerals, soup kitchens, fellowship meals, pot luck meals, or during times of disaster response.

The person in charge of the event is critical to its success. That includes ensuring that the food is safe. The persons in charge should visit with their local health agency or the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services to learn more about the rules that apply to preparing and serving food to large groups. After training, the person in charge is responsible for instructing other volunteers on food safety practices, answering questions and overseeing preparation, service and cleanup.

Following these simple rules should ensure that the people who consume food at your event or location will stay healthy.

Safe Water and Food Supply

Make certain that your drinking and cooking water is safe. In addition, verify that your food supply is from an inspected and safe source. This is especially important during disaster response and recovery efforts. Maintaining the health of disaster victims and those who are providing disaster response and recovery is extremely important.

Avoid Cross-Contamination

Take precautions to avoid contamination of ready-to-eat foods – such as produce, fruit, breads and ready-to-eat meats – with raw meats, raw poultry, raw eggs or raw fish. Common culprits in cross-contamination include cutting boards, cooking utensils and hands.

Keep Hot Foods Hot and Cold Foods Cold

Keep all poultry, meat, dairy, cooked vegetables and dishes containing these ingredients at the proper temperature. Hot foods should be held warm at temperatures above 135°F and cold foods should be held below 41°F.

Cool Foods Quickly

Hot foods and left over foods should to be cooled as quickly as possible. Foods should be cooled from a holding temperature to 70°F within 2 hours and from 70°F to 41°F within 4 more hours. Don't leave foods setting on the counter or table to cool—refrigerate them immediately.

Reheat Foods Quickly

Reheat all foods to 165°F within 2 hours. Make sure to check the temperature. If using a microwave to reheat, stir the foods frequently so the food is reheated uniformly.

Use Thermometers

Food temperatures should be taken periodically to ensure safe temperatures. Make sure to clean the thermometer before measuring food temperature. An inexpensive digital food thermometer is best for this purpose.

Transported Food and Buffets

All food that is transported from one site to another or kept on a buffet must be kept hot (135°F or above) or cold (41°F or below). This prevents the growth of germs.

Healthy Food Handlers Only

Do not allow sick people to work with food. Ensure that all food handlers are properly washing their hands with soap and warm water. Hand sanitizer is an excellent follow up to hand washing but it does not take the place of hand washing. Disposable single use gloves should be used when preparing food. Always use clean utensils to prepare and serve foods.

Cleaning and Sanitizing

Ensure that all food contact surfaces are washed, rinsed and sanitized. If using a household dishwasher, be sure not to overload it, and follow the manufacturer's directions. If manually washing dishes, a simple sanitizing solution in the final rinse water is adequate. Use one ounce of bleach for each three gallons of water.

The steps for manual dishwashing are:

1. Wash in hot soapy water.
2. Rinse all soap residue off in clean rinse water
3. Immerse all items in a final sanitizing rinse using a lukewarm bleach water solution describe above (Note: Hot water dissipates the concentration of chlorine rapidly and reduces the sanitizing effectiveness of the bleach.)
4. Let manually washed dishes air dry.

Thawing Foods

Never thaw foods on the counter at room temperature. This allows any germs present on the food opportunity to grow in numbers. The following methods are recommended for thawing foods safely:

- Thaw under running water (70°F or below) for less than 2 hours.
- Thaw in refrigerator at 41°F or below.
- Thaw in the microwave as part of the cooking process.

Proper Hand Washing

Proper hand washing is very important to protecting the health of those eating what you prepared.

How to Wash

- Use soap and warm running water
- Wash vigorously for 10-20 seconds
- Wash all surfaces, including your wrists, backs of hands, between the fingers and finger nails
- Rinse well
- Dry hands with a paper towel
- Use paper towel to turn off water

When to Wash

Hands should be washed before:

- Preparing food
- Eating or going on break

Hands should be washed after:

- Going to the toilet
- Coughing, sneezing or using a tissue
- Touching cuts, burns, or skin infections
- Handling dirty kitchen equipment, soiled utensils and dishes, or soiled work surfaces
- Handling raw meat or poultry

Should we use gloves or does it matter?

Glove use does not replace the need for good hand washing practices. However, if gloves are used the following guidelines should be helpful for ensuring food safety:

- The purpose of gloves is to protect the food from hand contamination.
- Wash hands before donning gloves.
- Put gloves on only when you are ready to handle ready-to-eat foods.
- Use gloves for only one task, such as making sandwiches or serving food, then discard them.
- Dispose of gloves as soon as they are removed.
- To avoid injury, never use single-use gloves around heat or hot fats.
- Gloves are susceptible to contamination, so throw them away when they become soiled or damaged, or when you switch to different food preparation activities.
- Fabric or reusable gloves may not be used with ready-to-eat food.