



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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10 HOLIDAY FOOD SAFETY TIPS TO KEEP YOU HEALTHY FROM THE HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

HONOLULU – The holiday season is that time of the year when we get together for potlucks with family, friends and co-workers. It is also a time for a potential increase in food-borne illnesses as a result of improper food handling, according to Peter Oshiro, environmental health program manager in the Hawaii Department of Health's Sanitation Branch.

"As consumers, we're all concerned about eating at restaurants with proper food-handling procedures. The Department of Health holds restaurants to high standards and they are motivated to correct any violations and make any improvements to retain customers," said Oshiro, who oversees the restaurant placard program that was launched in Hawaii six months ago. "However, many people do not realize that many food-borne illnesses are not from restaurants, but from the home."

Oshiro said his group holds public facilities accountable for food safety, but in the home, it is the individual's own responsibility to adhere to safe-handling practices. Whether you're hosting a buffet party or bringing a dish to a potluck, here are 10 holiday food safety tips to have safe holiday celebrations and prevent giving friends and family a case of food poisoning.

Food left out for long periods of time leaves the door open for uninvited guests – bacteria that cause foodborne illness. This makes foods at potlucks and buffets especially vulnerable.

1. Shop and Store Food Properly

Safe food handling starts when you're buying the ingredients. Shop for your groceries last and do not leave perishable foods in your vehicle. Bring a cooler with ice or ice substitute to store your milk and other perishables, if you have a long drive home, or if you have other stops to make. Make sure all perishables are placed in your refrigerator or freezer as soon as you get home.

2. Wash Your Hands / Make Sure the Cook is Healthy

Always wash your hands with soap and water before and after handling any food. Be sure to wash your hands after handling any raw meats or poultry because they may be contaminated with harmful bacteria. Do not prepare food if you are not feeling well -- especially if you have experienced any vomiting or diarrhea in the last 72 hours. You do not want to share your illness with friends and family. Ill food handlers are one of the major causes of food illnesses.

3. Prevent Cross-Contamination

Make sure that both you and the grocery store bag all raw meats and poultry separate from each other, and all other foods to prevent blood and other raw meat juices from contaminating any other foods. Arrange or plate ready-to-eat foods, like salads, poke, and, baked goods first. Poultry should be prepared separately if possible from other raw meats. Thoroughly wash and clean all surfaces between

poultry and raw meat preparation so you don't cross contaminate ready to eat foods or other food items during their preparation.

You should also keep your kitchen, dishes and utensils clean. Always serve food on clean plates, trays, or platters – never re-use containers or plates that were previously used to hold or prepare raw poultry or meats. Bacteria that may have been present in raw meat blood and juices can cross-contaminate the food to be served. Prepare ready to eat foods or foods that do not require cooking on separate cutting boards from the ones you use for raw meats and poultry.

4. Cook Meats and Poultry Thoroughly - Use a Cooking Thermometer

If you are cooking foods before your party, cook foods thoroughly to safe temperatures. When taking temperatures, make sure that the tip of the probe is in the center of the thickest portion of meat. Cook beef, veal, lamb, pork, fish and other seafood to at least 145°F. Roast whole poultry to 165°F, and ground turkey and all other poultry to 165°F. Hamburger, meat loafs, and other should be cooked to 155°F. Using a cooking thermometer not only ensures safe temperatures; it also prevents overcooking your meats, so you can always have that perfectly done, moist cut of poultry or meat.

5. Proper Food Cooling and Heating

Cook no more food than your kitchen's refrigerator/freezer and oven can handle. Most home refrigerators cannot safely cool large quantities of food. Keep cooking in advance to a minimum. If you must cook large quantities in advance, place food in large re-sealable bags, squeeze out the air and bury completely in ice to chill a few hours prior to placing in your refrigerator or freezer. Reheat chilled foods rapidly to 165°F for serving. Keep the rest of the food hot in the oven (set at 200-250°F), or cold in the refrigerator until serving time.

6. Maintaining Foods at Proper Temperatures

Foods that have been cooked to the proper temperatures should be held at 135°F or warmer by using the oven, chaffing dishes, slow cookers or warming trays. Cold foods should be held at 41°F or below. Keep foods cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice, otherwise use small serving trays and replace every two hours.

7. Thoroughly Wash Fruits and Vegetables

Always thoroughly wash all fruits and vegetables prior to preparation and serving. Rinse all fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten.

8. The Two-Hour Rule

Foods left out for long periods at potlucks and buffets are especially vulnerable to uninvited guests – bacteria that cause foodborne illness. Perishable foods should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours. Keep track of how long foods have been sitting out on the table and immediately refrigerate or discard anything that was left out for more than two hours.

9. Storing Leftovers

After the meal is over, put away all leftovers promptly, remembering the two-hour rule. All meats should be cut off the bone and placed in re-sealable bags and buried in ice to chill quickly. If ice is not available, place in shallow containers (less than 2" deep) to chill and store in the refrigerator. This same quick-chill method should be used for all other perishable foods that need cooling. If ice is not available, use shallow containers to refrigerate or freeze promptly. Don't forget to refrigerate the noodles and rice, too!

10. Preparing Leftovers

Use leftover meats, turkey, stuffing and other perishable cooked foods within three to four days. If you do not plan to use these foods in this time frame, consider dividing them up and freezing them for later use. Always reheat all foods rapidly to 165°F prior to eating.

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