



Graduation party food safety

By Deb Botzek-Linn, University of Minnesota Extension

5/20/2013 St. Cloud, Minn. — We are entering the season of graduation parties, family reunions, and community gatherings. These events include good people, good times, and good food!

If you are hosting or helping with a large quantity food event, be sure to keep food safety in mind. The combination of larger quantities of food, more helpers in the kitchen, and summer temperatures could result in unwanted foodborne illness for your guests. Infants and young children, older adults and those with weakened immune systems attending your gathering are at higher risk. Foodborne illness often presents itself with symptoms of nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or fever.

Food safety for a large event begins when planning the menu. Do you have enough refrigerator space for all the salads? How will you transport the deli trays and where will they be kept cold? How will you heat the sliced beef and keep it hot? Plan ahead to ensure that you have sufficient refrigeration space, coolers and ice, and hot holding equipment for the types and quantity of food you are serving.

Are you serving buffet style? Whether indoors or outdoors hot foods on a buffet need to be held above 140°F and cold foods below 41°F. Again, proper holding equipment is needed along with a food thermometer to check food temperatures. Ice, plenty of clean ice, is needed to keep salads, fresh fruit and vegetables and meat and cheese trays cold. One tip is to fill a large clean shallow plastic container with ice and set the serving bowls of cold food on the ice. Serve in smaller bowls and replace when empty rather than adding fresh food to the dish that has been sitting out.

Have a serving utensil—spoon, fork, or tong for every food item to avoid bare hand contact. Replace them periodically as many hands (some unwashed!) have touched them.

If making your own fresh fruit and vegetable trays, be sure to scrub melons and vegetables with a brush and water before peeling and rinse berries and grapes in a colander under cool running water.

Wash hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds and be sure your helpers do the same! Along with proper handwashing consider purchasing and using plastic gloves to serve cakes, breads, or to make meat or veggie trays.

What are your plans for leftover food? Have containers (and space) ready to refrigerate or freeze food that has maintained the proper temperature and discard foods in doubt. Don't leave perishable food out longer than 2 hours and 1 hour or less in summer temperatures of 90°F. Be

cautious on sending food home with guests, especially the elderly, unless you have a cold method of transportation on a warm summer day.

If you have food safety questions for your event, contact University of Minnesota Extension AnswerLine toll-free at 1-800-854-1678.

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