

Beat the Buffet Blues This Holiday Season

American Dietetic Association Provides Secrets for Safe and Festive Holiday Dining

CHICAGO (November 21, 2002) – This season, most Americans will toast the holidays with a more convenient alternative to the traditional sit-down dinner, as buffets and potluck-style celebrations take center stage. However, when serving food in this fashion, holiday hosts must take extra care to safeguard guests from food poisoning.

According to a recent national consumer survey* conducted by the American Dietetic Association, the majority of diners will participate in buffet-style (70%) or potluck (55%) gatherings this holiday season.

When hosting a festive gathering, make sure guests leave with their holiday gifts — but not a case of the buffet blues, otherwise known as food poisoning. It is important to take extra precautions when serving holiday buffets and potlucks because foods often sit out for long periods of time while guests snack, chat and revel in holiday cheer.

'Tis the Buffet and Potluck Season

Of the nearly 40 percent who plan to host holiday get-togethers, more than half (52%) will toss aside their serving spoon and ask guests to serve themselves from the buffet table. This year, Americans say their holiday spreads will feature popular foods such as cheeses (53%), pasta salads, dips/dressings (53%) and deviled eggs/egg-based salads or other fancy egg-based entrees (49%). Tasty and traditional, these foods can grow harmful bacteria quickly when left out of the refrigerator for more than two hours.

In fact, one in four reports intentions to display their buffet between three to five hours, an unsafe period of time for foods out of refrigeration. To help avoid this buffet blunder, consider setting a kitchen timer for two hours as a reminder to place uneaten food back in the refrigerator and to refresh your buffet table with new holiday favorites.

Help for the Host

The holiday chef at your gathering may not be equipped with the necessary tools to practice safe food handling. For example, half of those surveyed (54%) say they rarely or never use a meat thermometer to check the doneness of meats. And, most of us (82%) don't use a meat/food thermometer to check the temperature of reheated leftovers. Simple and inexpensive food safety tools make great stocking stuffers for the family chef or thank-you gifts for the holiday host:

- Seasonal soap dispenser for the kitchen, filled with your favorite fragrant soap.
- Cutting boards — purchase two, one red and one green for the holiday season.
- Meat/food thermometer, a must for the perfect holiday turkey, ham or beef feast.
- Refrigerator thermometer, to keep leftovers properly chilled for round two.

Making a List and Checking it Twice

Holiday lists of all types – gift, guest, grocery – help to keep the season organized. Yet, one of the most important lists usually goes unwritten, a food safety checklist. These helpful tips will ensure potluck and buffet meals not only taste good, but are safe for your guests to enjoy:

1. Always use a meat thermometer to check the doneness of foods. Cook favorite holiday foods like whole turkey to at least 180°F and ham to at least 160°F. Remember to reheat leftovers to 165°F and bring gravy to a boil before serving a second time.
2. When hosting potlucks, remind guests to safely transport their holiday dishes to the party — keep cold dishes cold and hot dishes hot! Pack food items in plenty of ice in a well-insulated cooler or other container with cooling packs. In regions with cold weather, transport the cooler in the trunk, which is the coolest part of the car in the wintertime. In warm weather climates, transport the cooler in an air-conditioned car instead of in a hot trunk. And for hot items, pack them in a well-insulated container and place them in the warmest part of your car. When you arrive, make sure to reheat foods to an internal temperature of 165°F.
3. When baking cookies, cakes or brownies that include eggs as an ingredient, fight the temptation to taste the raw dough or batter. Wait until these treats are fully cooked before surrendering to your sweet tooth.
4. Remember the two-hour rule. Refrigerate foods after two hours to avoid growth of harmful bacteria. If guests are bringing food, keep in mind that the clock starts ticking when they walk out their door to come over.

With approximately 65,000 members, the American Dietetic Association is the nation's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. ADA serves the public by promoting optimal nutrition, health and well-being. To locate a registered dietitian in your area, visit the American Dietetic Association at www.eatright.org.

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**Impulse Research Corporation conducted the home food safety survey in October 2002 for the American Dietetic Association through an online survey of 1,018 men and women age 20 and older with a margin of error of +/-3%*

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