Preparing, Serving, and Storing Food Safely

Whether it is preparing potluck dinners, lunch for the daycare or a meal for a charitable fundraiser, various employees and/or volunteers can be found in the kitchen preparing and serving meals. Even though these employees and/or volunteers have the best intentions when preparing or serving food, an accidental oversight could cause a massive case of food poisoning. To minimize food risks, a written policy regarding food preparation/food safety should be developed and all employees and/or volunteers who work in your kitchen should receive training on these procedures.

Food Preparation

- Only use foods before the “use by” date.
- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Wash fruits and vegetables with cold water before using. There is no need to wash or rinse meat or poultry.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and countertops with hot, soapy water before and in between using each food item.
- Use one cutting board for produce and a separate board for meat and poultry to reduce the risk of salmonella and other bacteria causing illnesses. Using different color cutting boards for different food items will help reduce cross contamination.
- Separate raw, cooked, and ready-to-eat foods while shopping, preparing, or storing. Never place cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry, or seafood.
- Keep juices from different food items from mixing.
- Marinate meat, seafood, and poultry in the refrigerator in a covered, non-metallic container.
- To properly thaw frozen meat, it's best to plan for slow, safe thawing in the refrigerator. Allow about one day for every five pounds of meat to thaw in the refrigerator.
- Many people assume that if a hamburger is brown in the middle, it is done. However, looking at the color and texture of food is not enough – you must use a food thermometer to be sure. The only safe way to know if meat, poultry and egg dishes are done is to use a food thermometer. Below are USDA recommended safe minimum internal temperatures, measured with a food thermometer:
    - Whole cut meat; beef, veal, lamb and pork – 145 degrees Fahrenheit (allow meat to rest for at least three minutes before carving or consuming).
    - Ground meat; beef, veal, lamb and pork – 160 degrees Fahrenheit.
    - All poultry (whole and ground) – 165 degrees Fahrenheit.
    - Egg dishes – 160 degrees Fahrenheit
    - Fish – 145 degrees Fahrenheit

    - Ground beef – 160 degrees Fahrenheit
    - Pork – 160 degrees Fahrenheit
    - Poultry, whole and chicken breasts – 165 degrees Fahrenheit
    - Steaks and roasts – 145 degrees Fahrenheit
- Do not serve home-canned foods. Most outbreaks of foodborne botulism are caused by home-canned foods.
- If commercial canned foods are leaking, bulging, swollen, look damaged or cracked, spurts liquid or foam when opened or is discolored, moldy or smells bad dispose of immediately.

Food Serving

- When someone brings food from home, be sure it is heated or refrigerated until it is served.
- When hosting a buffet, do not mix new food with existing food.
- Use separate platters for holding raw and cooked food.
- Food should not be left out at room temperature for more than two hours (one hour if over 90 degrees Fahrenheit outside). Remember, many foods brought from home will already have been out for a significant period of time.
- Hot foods should be refrigerated within two hours after cooking.
- Reheat leftovers to 165 degrees Fahrenheit or above. Food should be reheated only once.
- When served, hot foods should be kept at 140 degrees Fahrenheit or above and cold foods at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below. (A log should be kept of when and who checked temperatures.)
- Separate utensils should be used for each food item during cooking and serving.
- Disposable gloves should be used when handling ready-to-eat foods without utensils.



This photo is an example of properly refrigerated leftover food. Note that the food is appropriately covered, labeled, and dated.



This photo is an example of the temperature indicator on a refrigerator. Check refrigerator and freezer temperatures regularly and keep a log of when and who checked the temperatures.

Food Storage

- Label all foods with a date.
- Most refrigerated leftovers should be used in three to five days.
- Don’t ever taste food to check for freshness. When in doubt, throw it out.
- If using coolers, food should only be consumed if there is still ice in the cooler and the food is cooled to refrigerator temperature.

- Refrigerator temperatures should range from 34 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit (one to three degrees Celsius). Foods spoil rapidly above 40 degrees Fahrenheit (three degrees Celsius).
- The best temperature for frozen food storage is at zero degrees Fahrenheit (-17 degrees Celsius). The temperature should not reach higher than five degrees Fahrenheit (-15 degrees Celsius).
- Refrigerator and freezer temperatures should be periodically checked and a log kept of when and who checked temperatures.

Kitchen Sanitation

- An agreement with a professional pest control service should be in place for the kitchen area. This is not a service that should be provided by inexperienced staff members or volunteers.
- Mechanical dishwashing equipment should be in good repair, and temperature gauges should be monitored and documented.
- Garbage should be removed from the building after each meal.
- Garbage containers should be located an adequate distance away from the building.
- All food contact surfaces and utensils need to be cleaned and sanitized.
- Appropriate sanitizing solution should be used in correct concentrations. Bleach is not approved for sanitizing food contact surfaces.
- Employees and/or volunteers handling food should wash their hands frequently and correctly, should not use aprons or towels to dry hands after washing and should not handle, prepare or serve food if they have an apparent illness.

Make Your Kitchen Safer

By following these recommended food safety tips, not only will you make your kitchen safer, but you could prevent the possibility of an accidental case of food poisoning or something worse from occurring. Be proactive in protecting the people who enter your facility and make sure that your kitchen is as safe as it can be.

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