

## Key Steps for a Safe Potluck

- Be aware that foods can make people sick if not prepared, stored and served appropriately.
- Wash your hands, utensils and surfaces frequently and whenever in contact with food.
- Cook foods thoroughly and reheat cooked foods to at least 165°F.
- Separate raw and cooked foods to prevent cross contamination.
- Use small, shallow containers to quickly cool and heat foods.
- Do not overload your refrigerator.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Hot foods need to remain at or above 140°F for the whole event. Cold foods need to stay below 40°F.
- Use a food thermometer to test temperatures - touch and taste testing is not accurate.
- Perishable foods should not stay out for longer than 2 hours.
- When in doubt, throw it out!!!
- Contact your school or Health Department if you believe people may have gotten sick at the potluck event.

### More information is available at:

Loudoun County Health Dept.  
[www.loudoun.gov/EH](http://www.loudoun.gov/EH)

Partnership for Food Safety Education  
[www.fightbac.org](http://www.fightbac.org)

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Loudoun County  
Health Department

Loudoun County Health Department  
PO Box 7000  
Leesburg, VA 20177-7000

## School Potluck Food Safety



### *Look inside to find out:*

- Causes of illness at potlucks
- Steps you can take to prevent a foodborne illness
- What to do if you suspect people may have gotten sick

For more information, contact the Loudoun County Health Dept. at:  
PO Box 7000  
Leesburg, VA 20177-7000  
Phone: 703-777-0234  
E-mail: [health@loudoun.gov](mailto:health@loudoun.gov)



# School Potluck Food Safety – What You Need To Know

School potluck events are designed to raise funds, to build school spirit, and to share the varied cultures from which our students come. Cooking larger portions and having to store, transport and reheat foods, though, each pose a risk of causing a foodborne illness. The last thing a student, parent or school wants is for the event's food to cause people to get sick or hospitalized with nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or fever.

With a little planning and by following the key steps of cleaning, cooking, separating, and chilling, you can help assure a safe and fun event for everyone.

If anyone should become ill and suspects that it may be related to food served at an event, contact your school or local health department for advice and keep leftover food for possible testing.

## Clean

The first step to preventing infections is to remove as many bacteria and viruses from you and the food when preparing the food. Key components of this include:

- **WASH YOUR HANDS**

**OFTEN** with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds, before and after each time you handle food, and after blowing your nose or using the restroom.



Waterless hand sanitizer should be used if access to running water is limited.

- **WASH CUTTING BOARDS, DISHES, UTENSILS, AND COUNTER TOPS**

with hot soapy water after preparing each food item and before you go on to the next food.

- **RINSE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES** under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten.

- **RUB FIRM-SKIN PRODUCE** (or scrub with clean brush) under running tap water.

- **BLOT PRODUCE DRY** with a clean cloth towel or paper towel.

## Cook

Bacteria multiply rapidly between 40°F and 140°F. To keep food out of this “Danger Zone,” keep cold food cold and hot food hot. This is particularly true when making larger portions, where it takes longer for heat to penetrate the dish. Key components of this include:

- **USE A FOOD THERMOMETER** to make sure the food is done. The thermometer should be inserted into the middle of the dish and should reach the following temperatures:



- ☑ 160°F for fish, roasts, steak, lamb, pork, ground meats and egg-containing dishes.
- ☑ 165°F for ground turkey, chicken and duck.
- ☑ 180°F for whole poultry, casseroles and stuffed meats.
- **USE SHALLOW COOKING PANS** to speed the cooking in the center of the dish.
- **REHEAT FOOD THOROUGHLY** to kill off germs that may have survived the initial cooking or developed subsequently. This is of particular concern when reheating in a microwave or with an unfamiliar oven at school.
- **KEEP HOT FOODS HOT.** Crock pots are a good way to keep food temperatures above 140°F.

## Separate

Cross contamination is an important cause of foodborne outbreaks. For example, salmonella can spread when a fork used for handling raw chicken or eggs is then used to mix cooked ingredients. To help prevent cross contamination from raw red meat, poultry, and seafood:

- **KEEP RAW MEATS AND THEIR JUICES APART** from other food items in your grocery cart.
- **USE DIFFERENT CUTTING BOARDS** for raw meats and for salads and ready-to-eat food.
- **STORE RAW MEATS IN A CONTAINER** or on a plate so juices can't drip on other foods.

## Chill

Even if cooked well, foods can breed germs if not eaten or chilled quickly. This is of particular concern with potluck events, where food is more likely to be made in advance and in larger containers that are more difficult to chill. The food is also more likely to need to be transported to the potluck site and to be left out during the event.

The goal of this key step is to make sure the food is quickly and appropriately chilled. Key components of this include:

- **KEEP PERISHABLE INGREDIENTS IN THE REFRIGERATOR UNTIL NEEDED.**
- **THAW MEAT, POULTRY AND SEAFOOD IN THE REFRIGERATOR**, not on the counter.
- **REFRIGERATE OR FREEZE PERISHABLES, PREPARED FOOD AND LEFTOVERS** within 2 hours of preparing or serving and keep these foods refrigerated until ready to be reheated or served.
- **DO NOT OVERLOAD THE REFRIGERATOR** with too much hot food. This will raise the temperature of the refrigerator and freezer and slow down the chilling process. Consider staggering food preparation or using neighbors' refrigerators if cooking large quantities of food.
- **USE ICE TO KEEP FOODS COLD** on the potluck food service line or if there is not enough room in the refrigerator.

