

# 7 Food Safety Steps for Successful Community Meals

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For more food safety information, “Ask Karen” at [AskKaren.gov](http://AskKaren.gov) or call the toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at **1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)**; TTY: 1-800-256-7072; [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)

Whether preparing food for a family reunion or a community gathering, people who are great cooks at home don't necessarily know how to safely prepare and store large quantities of food for large groups. Food that is mishandled can cause foodborne illness. However, by following some simple steps, volunteer cooks can make the event safe and successful!

## Be Food Safe! Prepare with Care

### CLEAN.



Wash hands, utensils, and surfaces often.

### SEPARATE.



Don't cross-contaminate.

### COOK.



Use a food thermometer.

### CHILL.



Chill food promptly.

[BeFoodSafe.gov](http://BeFoodSafe.gov)

## 1 Plan Ahead — Make sure the location meets your needs.

- Be sure you have enough oven, stovetop, refrigerator, freezer, and work space.
- Find out if there's a source of clean water. If not, bring water for preparation and cleaning.

## 2 Store & Prepare Food Safely

- Refrigerate or freeze perishable food within 2 hours of shopping or preparing; 1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F.
- Find separate preparation areas in the work space for raw and cooked food.
- Never place cooked food back on the same plate or cutting board that held raw food.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and work surfaces frequently with hot, soapy water.
- Wash hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers, or handling pets.

## 3 Cook Food to Safe Minimum Internal Temperatures — It's the only way to tell if harmful bacteria are destroyed!

- Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of meat, poultry, casseroles, and other food. Check temperature in several places to be sure food is cooked to a safe minimum internal temperature.
- Never partially cook food for finishing later because you increase the risk of bacterial growth.

## 4 Transport Food Safely – Keep hot food HOT. Keep cold food COLD.

- Keep hot food at or above 140 °F. Wrap well and place in an insulated container.
- Keep cold food at or below 40 °F. Place in a cooler with a cold source such as ice or frozen gel packs.

## 5 Need to Reheat? Food must be hot and steamy for serving. Just “warmed up” is not good enough.

- Use the stove, oven, or microwave to reheat food to 165 °F. Bring sauces, soups, and gravies to a boil.

## 6 Keep Food Out of the “Danger Zone” (40–140 °F).

- Keep hot food hot — at or above 140 °F. Place cooked food in chafing dishes, preheated steam tables, warming trays, and/or slow cookers.
- Keep cold food cold — at or below 40 °F. Place food in containers on ice.

## 7 When In Doubt, Throw it Out!

- Discard food left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours; 1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F.
- Place leftovers in shallow containers. Refrigerate or freeze immediately.