FOOD SAFETY
AT
TEMPORARY EVENTS

Are your hot foods hot?
Cold foods cold?
Equipment and utensils clean?

International Association for Food Protection®
6200 Aurora Avenue, Suite 200W
Des Moines, IA 50322-2864, USA

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International Association for Food Protection®
6200 Aurora Avenue, Suite 200W
Des Moines, Iowa 50322-2864, USA
800.369.6337; 515.276.3344
515.276.8655 Fax
www.foodprotection.org
info@foodprotection.org

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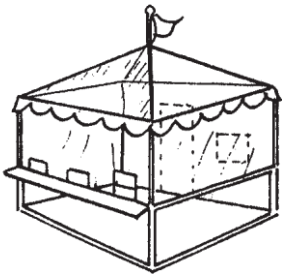
14 Steps to Safe and Sanitary Food Service Events

Church suppers, street fairs, civic celebrations and other similar events often call for volunteers to prepare and serve food safely for large groups of people. This 14-step guide based on recommendations by food safety experts will help you keep your temporary event free of the risk of foodborne illness.

1. **Obtain the proper permits.** Check with your local health department or other government agency about permits and food code requirements. Be prepared to tell the department where you will hold the event, if you will be holding the event on a regular basis, the number of people you anticipate serving, what you plan to serve, where the food will come from, how you will prepare and transport it and the precautions you will take to prevent contamination.

In the event of a foodborne illness, it will help if you can show you ran your event "by the book."

2. **Design your booth with food safety in mind.** The ideal booth will have an overhead covering, be entirely enclosed except for the serving window and have only one door or flap for entry. Clear plastic or light colored screening on sidewalls will aid visibility. Flooring must be of approved surface; no dirt floors are permitted. Only



food workers may be permitted inside the food preparation area; animals must be excluded. Location of food stand should be at least 100 feet from where animals are housed or from portable restroom facilities.

The more your food is exposed to outsiders, the greater the likelihood of contamination.

3. **Choose a food-safe menu.** Keep your menu simple, and keep potentially hazardous foods (meats, eggs, dairy products, cut fruits and vegetables, salads, etc.) to a minimum or take extra precautions for food safety. Use only foods from approved sources, avoiding foods that have been prepared at home. Cook to order to avoid the potential for bacterial contamination. Use precooked foods only if they have been properly chilled and reheated. Avoid using leftovers. Keep raw foods and cooked foods separate.

Complete control over your food, from source to service, is one key to safe, sanitary food service.

4. **Cook to the proper temperature.** Use an instant read food thermometer to check on cooking and cold holding temperatures of potentially hazardous foods. Check with your government agency for specific requirements. The USDA recommends that hamburgers and other ground meats be cooked to a minimum internal

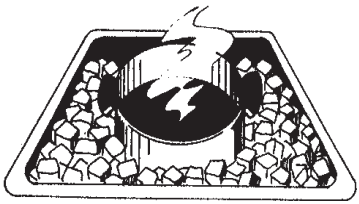
temperature of 160°F (71°C); poultry and poultry parts 165°F (74°C); medium-rare roasts or steaks 145°F (63°C); eggs, fish, pork and other meats 160°F (71°C). Foods cooked in a microwave must have a minimum internal temperature of 165°F (74°C).

Most illnesses from temporary events can be traced back to lapses in temperature control.

5. **Reheat with care.** Reheat foods rapidly to an internal temperature of 165°F (74°C). If the food has not reached this temperature within 2 hours, discard it. Do not attempt to reheat foods in crock-pots, steam tables or other hot holding devices, or over sterno. Foods **can** be safely kept hot at 140°F (60°C) in these hot holding devices.

Slow-cooking mechanisms used for reheating may activate bacteria and may never reach killing temperatures.

6. **Chill food promptly.** When cooked food will not be served immediately, it is essential to hold it properly (above 140°F) or to cool it as quickly as possible. Foods that require refrigeration must be cooled to 41°F (5°C) as quickly as possible and held at that temperature until ready to serve.To cool foods quickly, use an ice water bath (60% ice to 40% water),



stirring the product frequently, or place the food in shallow pans no more than 3-4 inches deep and refrigerate. Pans should not be stored one atop the other, and lids should be off or ajar until the food is completely cooled. Check the temperature periodically to see if the food is cooling properly. Cover the food once it has reached 41°F (5°C) in order to avoid contamination.

Allowing hazardous foods to remain unrefrigerated for too long has been the cause of many episodes of foodborne illness.

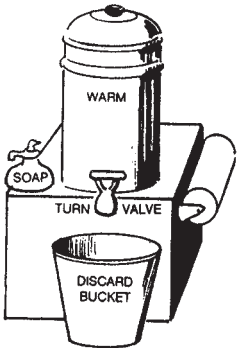
7. **Transport with care.** If food needs to be transported from one location to another, keep it well covered and provide adequate temperature controls. Use refrigerated trucks or insulated containers to keep cold foods cold (below 41°F) and hot foods hot (above 140°F).

Neglecting to consider food safety when transporting food can undo all the good of your other measures to prevent foodborne illness. Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.

8. **Take care with health and hygiene.** Only healthy workers should prepare and serve food. Any workers who show symptoms of a disease – cramps, nausea, fever, vomiting, diarrhea, jaundice, etc. – or who have open sores or infected cuts on the hands should not be allowed in the food booth. Workers should wear clean outer garments and should not smoke or eat in the booth. Food handlers should wear effective hair restraints, remove jewelry, and wash hands before preparing or serving food.

Ill or unclean personnel are a frequent cause of foodborne diseases. Smoking, besides being unhealthful and aesthetically unappealing in food preparation, contributes to the contamination of workers' hands.

9. Provide proper handwashing facilities. Clean running water, hand soap, and disposable paper towels are essential for setting up proper handwashing facilities. While cold water will work, access to warm water is ever better.



When water under pressure is not available, use a covered insulated container of at least 5-gallon capacity with a valve that allows a continuous flow of water over hands. Dispose waste water properly in a municipal sewer system or approved septic system. Wash your hands frequently: before starting work, before engaging in food preparation, after handling raw meat, after eating, smoking, coughing, sneezing or using a tissue, after handling soiled items or garbage, and after using the restroom.

Frequent and thorough hand washing remains the first line of defense in preventing foodborne disease. The use of disposable gloves can provide an additional barrier to contamination, but gloves are no substitute for hand washing.

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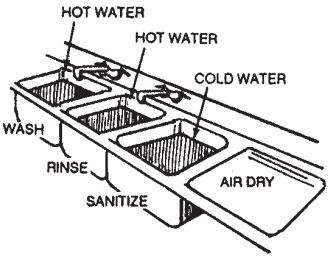
10. **Handle foods safely.** Avoid bare hand contact with ready-to-serve foods and food contact surfaces. Use disposable gloves, tongs, napkins, or other tools to handle food. Be sure to first wash hands thoroughly to avoid contaminating the outside of the gloves. Gloves used to handle food are for single use only and should never be washed and re-used. Gloves should be changed:

- As soon as they become soiled or torn
- Before beginning a different task (such as when you move from handling money to handling food)
- At least every 4 hours during continual use, and more often as necessary
- After handling raw meat and before handling cooked or ready-to-eat food

Touching food with bare hands or dirty gloves transfers germs to the food.

11. **Carefully clean all equipment.** Use disposable utensils for food service. Keep your hands away from food contact surfaces, and never re-use disposable ware. Wash equipment and utensils in a 4-step sanitizing process: washing in hot, soapy water; rinsing in hot water; chemical sanitizing; and air-drying. For chemical sanitizing, use concentrations recommended by the manufacturer. For example, soak equipment and utensils in solution of 1-tablespoon bleach for 1 gallon of water for two minutes.

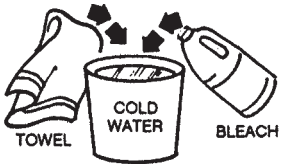


Clean utensils provide protection against the transfer of harmful germs.

12. **Properly store and handle ice.** Ice used to cool cans and bottles should not be used in cup beverages and should be stored separately, and be from an approved source. Use a scoop to dispense ice, never the hands.

Ice can become contaminated with bacteria and viruses and cause foodborne illness.

13. **Sanitize work surfaces and tables.** Sanitize work surfaces and tables with a dilute bleach solution. First, wash surfaces with warm soapy water and rinse. Then use a cloth to wipe with a sanitizer (use at concentrations specified by the manufacturer; for example, use 3 tablespoons bleach in 1 gallon of water). Rinse and store your wiping cloths in a bucket of sanitizer. Change the solution every 2 hours.



Clean and well-sanitized work surfaces prevent cross contamination and discourage flies.

14. **Control insects and carefully discard waste.** Keep foods covered to protect them from insects. Store pesticides away from food. If you apply insecticides or other pesticides, follow the label directions, avoiding contamination of food, equipment, or other food contact surfaces. Place garbage and paper wastes in a refuse container with a tight-fitting lid. Dispose of wastewater in a sewer or public toilet.

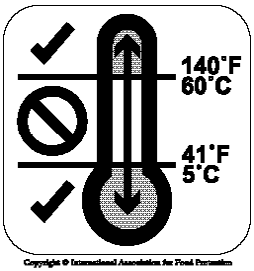
Flies and other insects are carriers of foodborne diseases. The chemicals used to kill them can be toxic to humans.

The Top Six Causes of Foodborne Illness

From past experience, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention list these six circumstances as the ones most likely to lead to illnesses. Check through the list to make sure your event has avoided these common causes of foodborne illness:

- **Inadequate Cooling and Cold Holding**

  More than half of all foodborne illnesses are due to keeping foods out at room temperature for more than 2 to 4 hours.



- **Inadequate Hot Holding**

  Cooked foods not held above 140°F (60°C) until served can be a significant source of foodborne illness.

- **Inadequate Reheating**

  When previously cooked foods are not reheated to above 165°F, illness often results.

- **Preparing Food Too Far Ahead of Service**

  Food prepared 12 or more hours before service increases the risk of temperature abuse.

- **Poor Personal Hygiene and Infected Personnel**

  Poor handwashing habits, and food handlers working while ill are implicated in 1 out of every 4 foodborne illnesses.

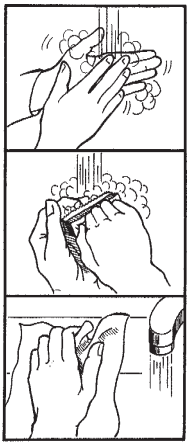
- **Contaminated Raw Foods and Ingredients**

Serving raw shellfish or raw milk that is contaminated, or using contaminated raw eggs in sauces and dressings, has often led to outbreaks of foodborne disease. It is always safer to use pasteurized products. Wash all fruits and vegetables before use.

Remember: When in doubt, throw it out!

Clean Hands for Clean Foods

Since the staff at temporary food service events may not be professional food workers, it is important that they be thoroughly instructed in the proper method of washing their hands. The following may serve as a guide:



- Use soap and water.
- Rub your hands vigorously for 20 seconds as you wash them.
- Wash ALL surfaces, including:
  - back of hands
  - wrists
  - between fingers
  - under finger nails using a good brush
- Rinse your hands well.
- Dry hands with a paper towel.
- Turn off the water using paper towel instead of your bare hands.

Wash your hands in this fashion before you begin work and frequently during the day, especially after performing any of these activities:

- Using the toilet
- Handling raw food
- Coughing or sneezing
- Touching hair, face or body
- Smoking
- Handling soiled items
- Scraping tableware
- Disposing of garbage

Written by:

The Food Sanitation Professional Development Group, 1998

Revised by:

The Outreach Education Professional Development Group, 2003

International Association for Food Protection®

6200 Aurora Avenue, Suite 200W
Des Moines, Iowa 50322-2864, USA
800.369.6337; 515.276.3344
515.276.8655 Fax
www.foodprotection.org
info@foodprotection.org

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