

Food Safety Tips for Potluck Parties

A potluck is a meal where different foods are prepared and then shared by a group of people at a common place during a private event. Private events that are not open to the public do not require a food permit from Fraser Health. However, please follow the food safety tips below at your next potluck to help prevent food poisoning.

Clean

- Wash hands with hot, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before and after preparing food, after using the toilet and when hands are dirty.
- Wash surfaces used to make and serve foods such as cutting boards, spoons, bowls, and plates with hot and soapy water. Afterwards rinse them with warm water and then sanitize them using a dilute bleach solution (1 tablespoon of bleach per gallon of water).
- Wash fresh fruits and vegetables under cool, running water.

Separate

- Separate raw meat, poultry and seafood from ready to eat foods such as salads.
- Place cooked food on a clean plate. Never use an unwashed plate that previously held raw meat, poultry or seafood.
- Use a separate cutting board. There should be one for fresh produce and another for raw meat, poultry and seafood.
- Keep foods covered as much as possible to prevent contamination
- Serve each food with a different utensil to prevent cross-contamination.

Cook

- Cook foods to the proper internal temperature:
 - Ground meat to at least 71°C/160°F.
 - Poultry to at least 74°C/165°F.
 - Fish to at least 70°C/158°F.
 - Steaks to at least 63°C/145°F and turn over twice during cooking.
 - Do not serve foods with raw or partially cooked eggs.
- Do not partially cook foods and then finish cooking them at the potluck.
- Reheat perishable foods that will be served hot to at least 74°C/165°F within 2 hours.
- Hold hot, perishable foods such as chili at 60°C/140°F or higher. Throw the food out if it has been held at room temperature for more than 2 hours.
- Use a sanitized food (e.g. probe) thermometer to measure the internal temperature of foods.

Chill

- Hold cold perishable foods at 4°C/40°F or lower.
- Cool hot perishable foods quickly. One method is to divide hot foods into smaller portions, place the food in shallow containers and then refrigerate the foods immediately.
- Avoid making large batches of food that must be cooled and reheated prior to serving.
- Throw out cold perishable foods, such as potato salad, if it has been held at room temperature for more than 2 hours. This includes the preparation time, travel time to get to the potluck and time on the meal table.
- Always marinate foods in a refrigerator at 4°C/40°F or lower.

Transporting Food

- Pack cold perishable foods in a cooler with ice packs.
- Transport hot perishable foods using an insulated container.
- Pack perishable foods just before you leave for the potluck and do not open the containers until you are ready to serve the food.
- Cover foods and keep them covered as much as possible to prevent contamination.

If you have a food allergy ask the person who prepared the food if it contains ingredients to which you are allergic.

It is important to remember that if you are sick you should not prepare food for others. For more information on keeping food safe call your local Environmental Health Officer or refer to HealthLinkBC for additional information on food safety.