



8 Tips to Keep Buffet Food Safe

Buffets are an easy and popular way to serve food at parties. However, if food is left out for long periods, bacteria that cause food borne illness can become an issue.

Bacteria are everywhere, and unlike microorganisms that can cause food to spoil, disease-causing bacteria are not always easy to smell or taste. Prevention is key, and one of the best ways to prevent food borne illness is to practice safe food handling.

Wash Your Hands

Always wash your hands before and after handling food, including before re-filling the buffet. Keep kitchen, dishes and utensils clean as well.

Cook Foods Thoroughly

When cooking foods ahead of time, be sure to thoroughly cook to safe minimum internal temperatures:

- *Beef steaks & roasts should be cooked to 145° F with a 3-minute rest time.*
- *Pork chops & roasts should be cooked to 145° F with a 3-minute rest time.*
- *Poultry (turkey/chicken) should be cooked to at least 165° F*

Rest time refers to the amount of time the meat needs to stand without carving or consuming once it has reached a minimum safe cooking temperature.

Store Prepared Dishes Safely

Keep hot food in the oven (set at 200° - 250° F) or cold food in the refrigerator until just before serving. If a hot dish needs to be warmed, reheat it to at least 165° F before serving.

Keep Hot Foods Hot

Hot foods need to be held at 140°F or warmer. Use chafing dishes, slow cookers, and warming trays on the buffet table to keep foods warm.

Use Ice to Keep Cold Foods Cold

Cold foods need to be held at 40°F or colder to keep bacteria from growing. Keep foods cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice.

Use Small Platters

Arrange and serve food on several small platters rather than one large platter. Replace empty platters rather than adding fresh food to a dish that has older food in it.

Avoid Cross Contamination

Always serve food on clean plates and make sure your guests take a clean dish when they go back for seconds.

Remember the 2-Hour Rule

Don't let foods sit at room temperature for more than two hours. Keep track of how long foods have been sitting on the buffet table and discard any perishable foods that have been sitting out for two hours or more.

For additional food safety tips, contact the NSF Consumer Affairs Office at info@nsf.org or download our [Food Safety fact kit](#).

NSF International is an independent, not-for-profit public health organization that certifies products and writes standards for food, water and consumer goods. NSF has a 65-year history of protecting public health, safety and environment worldwide.