

Food Safety at Temporary Events



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14 Steps to Safe and Sanitary Food Events

Church suppers, street fairs, civic celebrations and other similar events call for food service outlets to be set up out-of-doors or in locations where keeping foods safe and sanitary becomes a real challenge. This 14-step guide will help you keep your temporary event free of the risk of food poisoning.

Permits. Click the “BACK” button on your browser, then click “Temporary Food Establishment Checklist” for information about County permits and State Code requirements. Be prepared to tell the department where you will hold the event, 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”.*

Booth. 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 side walls will aid visibility. Only food workers may be permitted inside the food preparation area; animals must be excluded. *The more your food is exposed to outsiders, the greater the likelihood of contamination.*

Menu. Keep your menu simple, and keep potentially hazardous foods (meat, eggs, dairy products, potato salad, cut fruits and vegetables, etc.) to a minimum. Avoid using precooked foods or leftovers. Cook to order so as to avoid the potential for bacterial contamination. Use only foods from approved sources, avoiding foods that have been prepared at home. *Complete control over your food, from source to service, is the key to safe, sanitary food service.*

Cooking. Use a thermometer to check on cooking and cold holding temperatures of potentially hazardous foods. Hamburgers and other ground meats should be cooked to an internal temperature of 165° F; poultry parts to 180° F; pork and other meats to 160° F. *Most illnesses from temporary events can be traced back to lapses in temperature control.*

Reheating. Rapidly heat foods to above 165° F. Do not attempt to heat foods in crock pots, steam tables, or other hot holding devices, or over “Sterno”. *Slow-cooking mechanisms may activate bacteria and never reach killing temperatures.*

Cooling and Cold Storage. Foods that require refrigeration must be cooled to 41° F as quickly as possible and held at that temperature until ready to serve. To cool foods down 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 4" deep and refrigerate. Lids should be off or ajar until the food is completely cooled. Check the temperature periodically to see if the food is cooling properly. *Allowing hazardous foods to remain unrefrigerated for too long has been the number ONE cause of foodborne illness.*

Transportation. 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 hot foods hot (above 135° F) and cold foods cold (below 41° F). *Neglecting transportation can undo all of your other good measures to prevent contamination.*

Hand Washing. Provisions must be made for an adequate hand washing facility. In a pinch, a large urn full of water, a soap dispenser, a roll of paper towels, and a bucket to collect wastewater may do the trick. The use of disposable gloves can provide an additional barrier to contamination, but gloves are not a substitute for handwashing. *Frequent and thorough hand washing remains the first line of defense in preventing foodborne illness.*

Health and Hygiene. Only healthy workers should prepare and serve food. Any 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 in the booth. 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.*

Food Handling. Avoid hand contact with raw, ready-to-serve foods and food contact surfaces. Use disposable gloves, tongs, napkins, or other tools to handle foods. *Touching food with bare hands transfers germs to the food.*

Dish Washing. Use disposable utensils for food service. Keep your hands away from food contact surfaces and never reuse disposable ware. Wash equipment and utensils in a 4-step sanitizing process: washing in hot, soapy water; rinsing in clean water; chemical sanitizing; and air drying. *Clean utensils provide protection against the transfer of harmful germs.*

Ice. Ice used to cool cans and bottles should not be used in cup beverages and should be stored separately. Use a scoop to dispense the ice; never the hands. *Ice can become contaminated with bacteria and viruses and can cause foodborne illness.*

Wiping Cloths. Rinse and store your wiping cloths in a bucket of sanitizer (for example, 1 capful of bleach per gallon of water). Change the solution every 2 hours or more often if needed. Check the concentration of your sanitizer with your chemical test strips on a regular basis. Various environmental factors, from sunlight to heat, can render your sanitizer useless, especially if you are using bleach. *Well sanitized work surfaces prevent cross contamination and discourage flies.*

Insect Control and Wastes. Keep foods covered to protect them from insects. Store pesticides away from food. When you apply them, 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 diseases. The chemicals used to kill them can be toxic to humans.*

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 be used as a guide:

- Use soap and water
- Rub your hands vigorously as you wash them.
- Wash all surfaces, for at least 20 seconds, including:
 - Back of hands
 - Wrists
 - Between fingers
 - Under fingernails using a good brush
- Rinse your hands well
- Dry hands with a paper towel
- Turn off the water using the 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:

- After touching any bare human body parts other than clean hands and clean, unexposed portions of the arms
- After using the toilet room
- After caring for or handling animals
- After coughing, sneezing, using a handkerchief or disposable tissue
- After drinking, using tobacco, or eating
- After handling soiled surfaces, equipment or utensils
- During food preparation, as often as necessary to remove soil and contamination and to prevent cross contamination when changing tasks
- When switching between working with raw food and working with ready-to-eat food
- Directly before touching ready-to-eat food or food-contact surfaces, and
- After engaging in other activities that may contaminate the hands.

The Top Six Causes of Food Poisoning

From past experience, the US 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 covered these common causes of foodborne disease:

- **Inadequate Cooling and Cold Holding.** More than half of all foodborne illnesses are due to keeping foods out at room temperature for more than 2-4 hours.
- **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 illnesses.
- **Inadequate Reheating.** When leftovers are not reheated to above 165° F, illness can result.

- **Inadequate Hot Holding.** Cooked foods not held at 135° F or above until served can become highly contaminated.
- **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.
- **REMEMBER: WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**