

Food Safety for Tailgate Parties and Picnics

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With fall weather and football season, “tailgating” and picnicking become popular activities. Tailgate parties and picnics can be lots of fun, with good friends and good food. Don’t let your fun be spoiled by foodborne illness.

Foodborne illness, with its stomach cramps, diarrhea, nausea, headaches and maybe even vomiting, can result from the improper handling of foods. The bacteria that cause foodborne illness grow at temperatures between 40 and 140 degrees F. This is called the “danger zone.” Foods prepared for outdoor eating can fall into the danger zone even when the weather is cool.

What foods are risky? Almost any food can be a source of hazardous bacteria, but the most hazardous foods are moist and contain protein. This includes meats, poultry, fish, seafood, eggs and dairy products (cream pies, custards, and pastries that have cream fillings). Do not leave these foods in danger zone temperatures for more than 2 hours.

Perishable foods or dishes containing perishable foods should be kept either hot (at or above 140 degrees F) or cold (40 degrees F or below). How do you do this? Hot foods such as chili, soups, stews and dips can be transported safely in a thermos if it has no cracks or

leaks. Check the seal of the thermos for a tight fit. Keep the thermos clean; then right before use, rinse it with boiling water. Bring food to a boil before pouring it in the thermos. Try to prepare just enough to serve your guests without having leftovers.

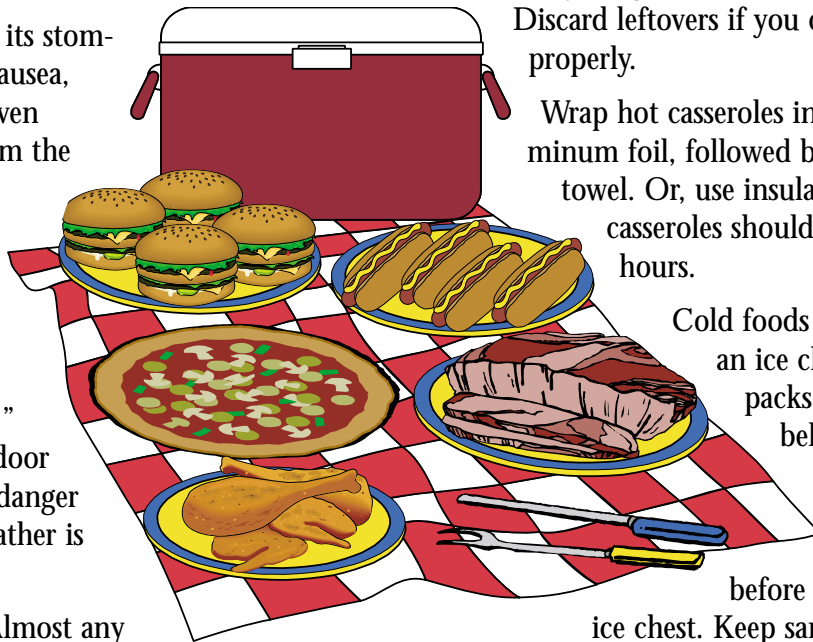
Discard leftovers if you cannot store them properly.

Wrap hot casseroles in several layers of aluminum foil, followed by newspapers and a towel. Or, use insulated containers. Hot casseroles should be served within 2 hours.

Cold foods can be transported in an ice chest with ice or cold packs to keep the foods below 40 degrees F. Pack the food in shallow containers and pre-chill them before placing them in the ice chest. Keep sandwiches cold or eat them within 2 hours.

Watch the clock on ready-to-serve and fast food, too. Fried chicken, deli foods, pizza and hamburgers, for example, should be purchased just before the party and eaten within 2 hours. Or, purchase these foods in advance, refrigerate them until party time, and then reheat them.

When you don’t have time for precautions, serve only nonperishable foods. Try canned meats, dried or cured meats, some hard cheeses, peanut butter, dried fruits, breads, cereal mixes, nuts and popcorn.



Once the party starts, follow through with safe food handling practices. Keep hands, utensils and dinnerware clean. (Disposables make that easier to do.) Spread a clean table cloth on the tailgate or picnic table and enjoy.

To enjoy a tailgate party or picnic without later distress:

- Plan your menu to fit the situation.

- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
- Don't let perishable foods stay in the "danger zone" (40 to 140 degrees F) for more than 2 hours.
- Keep everything clean to avoid contamination.
- Take proper care of leftovers, or throw them away.

Happy tailgating and picnicking!

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