

FOOD SAFETY FOR CHURCH DINNERS

One of the biggest food safety mistakes people make during church dinners is that they let perishable food items sit out on a table at room temperature for too long. Both hot hold and cold hold foods are taken out of the refrigerator or oven at the church member's home, and then they are transported to the church and placed on a serving table where they sit during the service awaiting the dinner time after the service. Any foods- hot or cold- that has been sitting out at room temperature for more than 2 hours can easily allow bacteria to multiply and cause illness. When perishable foods are not kept on a heating source (chafing dish or slow cooker/crock pot) or nestled in a chilling source (bowls of ice or ice chest on ice), they enter the *Danger Zone* between 41 F and 135 F

Where bacteria grow the most rapidly and should be thrown away after remaining at room temperature for more than 2 hours.

Before handling food you are preparing wash your hands with warm soapy water for 20 seconds and then dry your hands with a clean paper towel, not a dirty cloth towel used by the whole family. Wear clean throw away plastic gloves or use alcohol gel hand sanitizer (Purel) before handling ready to eat food.

Keep raw meat and poultry separate from cooked foods. Do not use the same cutting board for raw vegetables that was previously used to cut raw chicken or meat. The juices from raw meat can contain harmful bacteria that cross contaminates other foods. If you have only one cutting board cut vegetables first and then wash it in warm soapy water and use it to cut meat second.

Use a food probe thermometer (cooks thermometer- 0 F to 220 F) to make sure your foods are in *The Red Zone* and fully cooked. Meat and poultry including wings, sausages and hamburgers, should be cooked to a temperature high enough to kill harmful bacteria such as *Salmonella* and *E. coli 0157:H7*.

And remember, color is not a reliable indicator of doneness- internal temperature is. Use a food thermometer to be sure meat and poultry are safely cooked. Steaks should be cooked to 145 F, ground beef should be cooked to 160 F, and all poultry (chicken and turkey) should be cooked to 165 F. Once your foods have reached *The Red Zone* for food safety, protect your church members from *The Danger Zone*. Don't leave foods sitting out for more than two hours at temperatures between 41 F and 135 F .

Any leftovers to be taken home after the church dinner should be refrigerated or frozen promptly. Leftover hot foods should be reheated to 165 F before eating. Keep cold food cold at 41 F or colder, the same rules of *The Danger Zone* apply for cold foods, too. If cold food has been sitting out for more than 2 hours, do not eat it, throw it away.

Please call Mike Plemons, RS/REHS of the Duncanville Health Department at 972-780-4963 with your food safety questions.