14 Steps to Safe and Sanitary Food Service at Temporary 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 become a real challenge. This 14-step guide will help you keep your temporary event operating safely and protect public health.

1 Permits. Check with your local government agency about permits and 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 the food, and precautions taken to prevent food contamination.

2 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 colored screening on side walls will aid visibility. Only food workers may be permitted inside the food preparation area; animals must be excluded from entering booth.

The more your food is exposed to outsiders, the greater the likelihood of contamination.

3 Menu. Keep your menu simple and keep potentially hazardous foods (meats, 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; do not serve foods that have been prepared at home.

Complete control over your food, from source to service, is the key to safe, sanitary food service.

4 Cooking. Use a food thermometer to check on cooking and cold holding temperatures of potentially hazardous foods. Hamburgers and other ground beef should be cooked to 155°F or until juices run clear; poultry to 165°F; pork and other meats to 145°F.

Most illnesses from temporary events can be traced back to lapses in temperature control.

5 Re-heating. Heat foods to above 165°F within 30 minutes. Do not attempt to heat foods in crock pots, steam tables, sterno, or other hot holding devices.

Slow-cooking mechanisms may activate bacteria and never reach killing temperatures.

6 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) and stir the product frequently or place the food in shallow pans no more than 2 inches deep and refrigerate. Pans should not be stored one atop the other and lids should be off or ajar until the food is completely cooled. Check the temperature periodically to see if the food is cooling properly; 135°F to 41°F within 6 hours and during this time, reduce food temperatures from 135°F to 70°F in 2 hours.

Allowing hazardous food to remain un-refrigerated for more than a couple hours has been the cause of many episodes of food poisoning.

7 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 food cold (below 45°F).

Neglecting safe food handling during transportation can undo all the good of your other measures to prevent contamination.

8 Hand Washing. Provisions must be made for an adequate hand washing facility. Provide a large urn full of warm water with nozzle which provides continuous flow of water, a pump soap dispenser, a roll of paper towels, and a bucket to collect waste water. Hand sanitizer maybe used in addition to but not a replacement for hand washing.

The use of disposable gloves can provide an additional barrier to contamination, but gloves are not a substitute for hand washing. Frequent and thorough hand washing remains the first line of defense in preventing food borne disease.

9 Health & 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 restrain hair. Do not smoke in the food booth or any food preparation area.

Ill or unclean personnel are the frequent cause of foodborne diseases.

10 Food Handling. Avoid hand contact with raw, read-to-serve foods and food contact surfaces. Use disposable gloves, tongs, napkins or other tools to handle food.

Touching food with bare hands can transfer germs to the food.

11 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 hot water; submerge in chemical sanitizer; and air dry.

Clean utensils provide protection against the transfer of harmful germs.

12 Ice. Ice used to cool cans, bottles, and store food should not be used in cup beverages. Store ice used for consumption separately. Use a scoop with a handle to dispense ice, never the hands.

Ice can become contaminated with bacteria and viruses, causing foodborne illness.

13 Wiping cloths. Rinse and store your wiping cloths in a bucket of sanitizer (ex: 1 capful of bleach in 1 gallon of warm water). Change the solution every 2 hours.

Well sanitized work surfaces prevent cross contamination and discourage flies.

14 Insect Control & Wastes. Keep foods covered to protect them from insects. Store chemicals or pesticides away from food. Do not use the chemicals in the food booth; avoid contamination of food, equipment, or other food contact surface. Place garbage and paper wastes in a refuse container with a tight-fitting lid. Dispose of waste water in grey water receptacle or public toilet.

Flies and other insects are carriers of foodborne diseases. The chemicals used to kill them can be toxic to humans.
The Top Six Causes of Food Poisoning

From past experience the U.S. Centers for Disease control and Prevention list these six circumstances as the one 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 food poisoning are due to keeping foods out at room temperature for more than a combined total of 4 hours.

- **Preparing Food Too Far Ahead of Service**
  Food prepared 12 or more hours before service increases the risk of temperature abuse.

- **Poor Person Hygiene and Infected Personnel**
  Poor handwashing habits and food handlers working while ill are implicated in 1 out of every 4 food poisonings.

- **Inadequate Reheating**
  When leftovers are not reheated to above 165°F, food can become contaminated with pathogenic bacteria.

- **Inadequate Hot Holding**
  Maintain cooked foods at or above 135°F until served to prevent bacteria growth.

- **Contaminated Raw Foods & 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 safer to use pasteurized products.

  **Remember:** When in doubt, throw it out!

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 serve as a guide:

1. **Wet hands**
2. **Soap** (20 seconds)
3. **Scrub backs of hands, wrists, between fingers, under fingernails.**
4. **Rinse**
5. **Towel dry**
6. **Turn off taps with towel**

Wash your hands in this fashion before you begin work and frequently during the day, especially after performing any of these activities:
- Using the toilet
- Smoking
- Handling raw food
- Coughing/sneezing
- Scrubbing tableware
- Disposing of garbage
- Touching hair, face or body

Food Safety

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