

Food Safety Guidance for Departmental Christmas Parties

When organising a departmental Christmas party, the safest approach is to arrange catering through a University outlet, University Catering Service or one of the University's preferred suppliers ([External catering suppliers | University Catering](#)). Choosing a supplier outside of this preferred list means you assume responsibility in the event of any food poisoning incident.

Staff should be discouraged from bringing in food to share, as self-catering carries certain risks. If homemade food is provided, the person who prepared it must supply a complete list of ingredients to ensure allergen information is available. It is also recommended to display a notice stating that homemade items cannot be guaranteed to be completely free from allergens.

Cross-contamination is a leading cause of food poisoning. It occurs when bacteria from raw foods, pets, hands, dirty cloths etc. are transferred onto ready-to-eat food, which can result in food poisoning outbreaks.

If a department decides to self-cater by purchasing food from supermarkets for a buffet, or on a 'bring and share' basis, certain precautions must be observed and key issues considered - **large events come with greater responsibilities.**

Catering for parties and functions often involves large amounts of both cooked and uncooked food competing for fridge, freezer, and cooker space. This increases the risk of cross-contamination and places extra pressure on refrigeration units, which may struggle to maintain safe temperatures.

Careful planning of cooking and storage is therefore essential. Many foods such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy products, and rice can cause food poisoning if not handled and stored correctly. To ensure safe catering at functions, adequate facilities and controls must be in place; if these cannot be provided, the event should not be catered for at all.

REQUIREMENTS TO FOLLOW

- Purchase foods from a reputable supplier and keep receipts. Do not purchase foods too far in advance, always check 'use-by dates' and ensure the packaging is intact. Check labels for allergens so you can confirm if any of the dishes contain allergens.
- Use cool boxes where possible to transport cold food to the venue. Ensure raw and cooked foods are kept separate during transport and minimise time to the venue.

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- Ensure all foods are stored correctly and safely.
- Keep raw and cooked/ready-to-eat foods separate at all times and use separate utensils etc.
- Wash hands frequently while preparing food, and always after handling raw foods.
- Wash hands thoroughly in hot soapy water and dry properly.
- Ensure all crockery, worktops, and cutlery etc. are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before use.
- Do not allow anyone who has, or has recently had, diarrhoea or vomiting in the kitchen or to be involved in food handling.
- Cover any cuts or grazes with a waterproof dressing.
- Keep chilled foods in the fridge when you are not using them. Make sure you have the capacity to keep food cool below 8°C (ideally at 5°C). You must never leave food out in a warm office all day.
- Dispose of any high-risk food that has been left at room temperature for more than 2 hours.
- Defrost frozen meat/poultry fully, ideally at the bottom of the fridge in a container to catch any juices/drips.
- Ensure that once raw meats have been prepared, the work surfaces, chopping boards, knives and utensils are thoroughly washed and disinfected immediately afterwards.
- Cook food thoroughly, above 75°C, to kill bacteria that could cause food poisoning. The use of a disinfected probe thermometer is recommended.
- Cool cooked foods quickly before putting them into the fridge. Cover the food loosely with a food grade material such as parchment paper and cool within 1½ hours.
- Ensure any special diets that are catered for are kept totally separate, covered and any manufacturers ingredient labels retained. Where there is doubt, discuss with the person who has the allergy - never guess or assume.
- Do not prepare food too far in advance.
- Do not allow raw meat or defrosting food to drip onto cooked or prepared foods. Keep these raw items at the bottom of the fridge and protect the salad drawers.
- Do not use dirty cloths, sponges, and tea-towels. Keep plenty of clean ones handy and ideally use disposable towels/kitchen roll for drying.
- Do not fill the fridge with wines, beers, and soft drinks. While these may taste better cold, they do not need to be refrigerated. If space is short, keep them in separate ice buckets or cold water so that you can keep available fridge space for high-risk food items.

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- Do not overload your fridge. Its efficiency will suffer if the cooling air circulating inside cannot flow freely. Use a fridge thermometer to check the temperature (should be below 8°C).
- Do not use ice from laboratory ice makers.
- Do not store or prepare food or drink in a laboratory or workshop area. All food and drink must be stored away from chemicals and biological agents.
- Do not reheat cooked food more than once. Make sure it is piping hot throughout before serving. The use of a disinfected probe thermometer is recommended.
- All rubbish must be removed at the end of the day.

Note: Anyone involved in preparing or cooking food must have an appreciation of Food Safety principles and apply the highest standards of practice. Ideally, they should hold Level 2 Food Safety training, and at the very least, they should read this leaflet. For further information on food hygiene training please refer to Food Safety Information leaflet number 4.

Further Information

On the Food Standards Agency website www.food.gov.uk

In other leaflets in the food safety information series

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