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New Years Eve Buffet

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Can perishable foods such as seafood, poultry, and cooked meats be kept HOT (above 140°F)? Bacteria grow best in lukewarm foods. Never let these foods stand at room temperature more than 2 hours.

Holiday meals are fun but need careful planning. How many people can you safely serve? And, how much time will it take to prepare the food? Don't try to feed more people than you can handle. Consider the size and quantity of the cooking equipment you have, your supply of eating utensils and dishes. Figure out how much refrigerator space you'll need to store foods.

By Evelyn B. Spindler, Ph.D., Nutritionist, and Elizabeth Fleming, Information Specialist

Extension Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Holiday Meals—Things To Consider

Tray of Sliced Lunch Meats
Shrimp Salad
Deviled Eggs
Crackers and Cheese
Chive Sour Cream Dip and Crackers
Beverages (including eggnog)

All year long, you've been going to other people's parties. Now—it's your turn and the temptation is to pay back all your entertaining debts with a New Year's Eve buffet. That does sound like a good idea, doesn't it?

But, first decide how many people you can safely, economically, and realistically serve. Then make up the guest list and party menu.

If cold cuts are part of the holiday party fare, make sure that they are fresh and kept chilled. Don't allow them to stand at room temperature too long. Instead, use several trays of food; while one is on the table, keep the rest refrigerated. Bring out a fresh tray frequently to replace those partly used. Then meats stay cold and bacteria don't have a chance to grow.

Shrimp salad is another perishable item. How about packing the serving dish in cracked ice? Or, use smaller serving dishes and refill often from the refrigerator.

Deviled eggs, cheese, and sour cream dip all must be kept cold. Serve only what is needed at any one time and replace with fresh, chilled foods when needed.

Be especially careful with eggnog. A punch bowl of eggnog that stands for hours at room temperature is a fine breeding place for bacteria. Keep the eggnog well chilled and replace the supply often.

Can you prepare and serve the food to avoid foodborne illness? Your family may enjoy meals every day without problems, but on holidays when large groups get together, the types and larger quantities of foods present different problems. You may not have enough refrigerator space.

Bacteria can cause food poisoning. All they need to grow is the right combination of time, temperature, and moisture.

Foodborne illness can cause diarrhea, vomiting, stomach cramps, and other unpleasant symptoms which can last for several hours or even days. With young children and elderly people, the results can be more severe. Often, people mistake foodborne illness for a simple "bug" or virus. The real cause may be food that was not properly handled, prepared, or served. This can be prevented.

Can perishable foods such as cream pies, seafoods, and dishes made with eggs, fish, meat, and poultry be kept COLD (below 40° F)? Do not let these foods stand at room temperature more than 2 hours.