

Daily Union Article  
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Title: Super Bowl Food Safety

It doesn't matter if you are a Falcons fan or a Patriots fan, if you are not attentive to the food safety practices during the 2017 Super Bowl Game, you can get sick from a food borne illness.

The average length of the Super Bowl broadcast over the past two decades has been 3 hours and 35 minutes. This offers an ideal setup for food borne illness to strike at your Super Bowl party. Keeping food at room temperature for more than 2 hours makes it unsafe to eat due to the growth of dangerous food microbes.

Each year, 1 in 6 Americans get sick by consuming contaminated foods or beverages. With over 250 different recognized foodborne diseases identified in the food system, there is ample opportunity for a person to become sick if the food they consumed has not been handled, prepared, and maintained in a safe environment. Thus, with the average length of the Super Bowl being over three hours long, any perishable food being served could be a potential food poisoning threat.

Many foodborne microbes are present in healthy animals that can get transferred to humans as it is processed and prepared. Our strict commercial food production and food preparation regulations in the United States protect us from ingesting these microbes at the retail level, but how we handle the food in our home is equally important for ensuring that we and our Super Bowl party guests don't "draw a penalty" from foodborne illness.

What can you do to help avoid this risk? You need to step up and be a "Team Manager" for the big game! The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) offers these tips for a "bacteria-free buffet" this Super Bowl Sunday (or for any type of party!):

**Manage Serving Quantities:** If you're planning to serve your food buffet style, "huddle up" smaller serving dishes. This allows you to manage the temperature at which the food is maintained while it is out and forces you to restock as needed with food that has been stored safely up to the point of serving.

- 1) Prepare a number of small platters ahead of time, cover with food storage plastic wrap, and replace the serving dishes more frequently through the party.
- 2) Store cold back-up dishes in the refrigerator or keep hot food in a 200° – 250° F oven. This gives your late-arriving guests the same appetizing food choices that the early arrivals had.

**Manage Food Temperature:** The rule of thumb is to "keep hot foods hot, and cold foods cold!"

- 1) Hot food should be kept at a minimum internal temperature of 140°F. Use a food thermometer to check the temperature at least every 2 hours. Serve or keep hot foods in chafing dishes, slow cookers, or warming trays. However, be aware that some warming trays do not reach the 140°F threshold required to keep hot foods safe. Check the owner's manual to find out the temperature capability of the appliance. No owner's manual? – look for an online document through the manufacturer's website.
- 2) Cold food should be kept at or below 40°F. Keep foods in the refrigerator until serving and don't let them set out for more than 2 hours. If a food is going to remain on the serving table longer than the 2 hour limit, place the platter of food on ice to retain the chill. Use a food thermometer to check the temperature at least every 2 hours. Return to the refrigerator if it is approaching the 40°F maximum temperature. Rotate out one of the extra platters you are storing in the refrigerator.

**Manage the Freshness:** Remove your injured players! Don't reuse the same serving dish for perishable foods.

- 1) There are always food particles left behind on a platter. Start fresh every time. Adding properly stored food to food that has already been out on the serving table lends itself to cross-contamination. The food that was previously served will not get to the temperature it needs to simply by adding new food to it. This will allow any food microbes that had already begun to multiply and great opportunity to multiply even faster!
- 2) Be aware that during the course of the Super Bowl buffet, bacteria from people's hands can contaminate the food, as well. Making sure you have serving utensils can help reduce this possibility, but all too often, our guests will still reach in the bowl for a handful of chips or popcorn on their way by. Serve "finger food" from smaller bowls and avoid combining the leftover crumbs to the top of a fresh bowl or platter. It is better to toss the small amount of left-overs than to cause someone to become ill.

**Manage the Clock:** Remember the 2-hour reference made at the beginning of this article?

- 1) Throw away any perishables left out at room temperature for more than two hours, unless you have served it in a container that has maintained the appropriate internal temperature.
- 2) If you are sending "care packages" home with leftovers from the big game, remind your guests that the food needs put in the refrigerator within two hours of when you removed it from a climate controlled environment. Those BBQ cocktail hotdogs have a two hour room temperature limit after they have been removed from their hot slow cooker!

If you aren't sure how long food has been left out, I suggest you "punt". When in doubt, throw it out rather than make one of your guests sick because you "fumbled the ball!"

For more information on safe food preparation, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!