

Operator's Edge

The Successful Independent Operator's Resource

8 Tips for Maintaining Food Safety at Catered Events

Catering businesses can sometimes pose a bigger risk to food safety than traditional restaurants, because the more the food is handled or transported, the greater the risk of bacterial contamination. Caterers just have to keep a watchful eye on employees to make sure safe food handling practices are observed at all times. Here are eight tips caterers can follow in order to maintain food safety standards at their events:



1. Follow safe food preparation practices. For catered events, most food is either prepared ahead of time at a central location and then transported to the event or made at an onsite kitchen, if there is one available. Either way, all food must be cooked to the recommended temperatures in order to maintain safe food temperatures.

2. Transport food in insulated food carriers. Both hot and cold foods need to be kept at the appropriate temperatures when being transported to the catering event. The only way for caterers to assure hot foods are kept hot and cold foods cold while in transit is by using insulated food carriers.

3. Reheat foods to 165 degrees F. The *FDA Food Code* stipulates that any food that needs to be reheated must reach an internal temperature of 165 degrees F for 15 seconds to be considered safe, so be sure that any food items that were cooked off-site then chilled for transport are reheated appropriately to maintain food safety.

4. Have hand washing stations available. As with any foodservice operation, employees must have access to hand washing stations so they can frequently wash their hands. If the catered event is indoors, there should be hand sinks nearby, either in a kitchen or restroom. For outdoor catered events, the caterer will need to bring along portable hand sinks or set up another mobile hand washing station to give employees a place to wash their hands.

5. Make sure dish washing equipment is available. Even if it is a one-day event, caterers need access to commercial dishwashers in order to clean any food contact surfaces and utensils during and after the event. If there is no three-compartment sink available at the venue, one can be temporarily installed and plumbed for the event.

6. Time and temperature control still applies. The two-hour rule still applies for potentially hazardous foods. All hot food needs to be kept above 140 degrees F and cold food needs to be kept below 40 degrees F for proper food safety. If the food is outside of this range for more than two hours, that food needs to be thrown away.

7. Separate display ice and beverage ice. At all times, ice that is used to chill food or beverage bottles needs to be kept separate from ice that goes into drinks. Display ice can pick up bacteria and other contaminants from the items it comes into contact with, which can in turn contaminate beverage ice and a customer's drink.

8. Provide extra protection for outdoor events. For outdoor catered events, wind, flies and other vermin are potential hazards. The best way to protect against these dangers is by covering all displayed food, throwing all waste in a waste container with a lid, using wind guards on windy days and setting the food tables up underneath a tent.

Temporary Permit

All caterers need to contact the local health department and obtain a temporary food handler's permit for every event they cater. The temporary permit establishes the event location as the "place of business" for the caterer and assures that the food handling, preparation and serving practices are compliant with all local health codes.

Source: Jason Rahm for Foodservice Warehouse