

Tips to Referee a Safe “Big Game” Party

From the United States Department of Agriculture

When it comes to the “Big Game”, defense matters. When it comes to planning a game day party, a good defense against foodborne illness matters even more. The “Big Game” draws over 100 million television viewers who consume approximately 1.3 billion chicken wings during game day parties. With an average National Football League game taking more than 3 hours to play, Americans will be mixing plenty of football watching with food during their game day parties.

Illegal use of Hands

Avoid penalties for “illegal use of hands.” Unclean hands are one of the biggest culprits for spreading bacteria, and finger foods at parties are especially vulnerable. Chefs and guests should wash their hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before and after handling food. Also, be sure to clean eating surfaces often, and wash serving platters before replenishing them with fresh food.

Offsides

Think of your party fare as two different teams—uncooked versus ready-to-eat foods. Prevent “encroachment” at all costs and keep each team in its own zone. The juices from raw meat can contain harmful bacteria that cross-contaminate other food. Use one cutting board for raw meat and poultry and another one for cutting veggies or foods that will not be cooked. If you use only one cutting board, wash it with hot soapy water after preparing each food item.

Equipment Violations and Holding

Call a “time out” and use a food thermometer to be sure meat and poultry are safely cooked. Remember that internal temperature, not meat color, indicates doneness. Steaks should be cooked to 145°F, ground beef cooked to 160°F, and all poultry should be cooked to 165°F.

“Holding” may be one of the most likely offenses your referee encounters if your party lasts late into the night. Never hold foods for more than two hours at room temperature. Refrigerate or freeze leftovers promptly to block offensive bacteria from multiplying. The same rules apply for cold foods. If cold food has been sitting out for more than two hours, do not eat it. When in doubt, throw it out of the game—and your party.

False Start

When it comes to foodborne illness, there is no opportunity for an instant replay. To avoid these infractions, make sure you understand the rules completely. Food safety coaches are available Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET online and by phone at the USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854). Recorded messages are available 24 hours a day.



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