



FOOD SAFETY UPDATE

Fall Food Safety

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It's the beginning of the holiday season—Halloween is just around the corner. Many organizations including 4-H clubs will be planning potlucks and parties. There are some foods that have become standards during this season. Most Halloween parties include cookies and cider.

An easy addition to

potlucks are baked potatoes, or how about a hot potato bar? To bake potatoes, just wrap them in foil, pop them in the oven, and your good to go! And no Halloween celebration is complete without a jack-o-lantern or two.

This issue will look at safety including these foods in your holiday celebration.



Baked Potato Safety Measures

Potatoes baked in aluminum foil and kept warm or stored at room temperature may cause life-threatening botulism for those who consume them.

Potatoes may be contaminated with spores of *Clostridium botulinum* (*C. botulinum*), a spore-forming bacterium that is widely found in the environment, including soils. *C. botulinum* may be present on fruits and vegetables, especially those that are in contact with the soil, such as potatoes. If the spores are ingested in this manner, they remain harmless. However, baking the potatoes in aluminum foil and holding them wrapped at room temperature, or keeping them warm (at temperatures between 72°F to

149°F), may create ideal conditions for spores, if present, to germinate, grow, and produce toxins. To prevent the risk from botulism, any left over potatoes must be unwrapped and refrigerated as soon as possible or with 1-2 hours at 39°F.

The proper preparation of baked potatoes should include washing the potatoes thoroughly. Scrub with a vegetable brush under running water (do not use soap) before wrapping them in foil. Immediately serve and eat baked potatoes.



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Eating Jack-O-Lanterns

Many feel it is a waste to throw away a jack-o-lantern once Halloween is over. Is it safe to eat a pumpkin after it's been used for this purpose?

Absolutely not! Like many other foods, pumpkins can spoil very quickly, when exposed to environments that promote bacterial growth. Bacteria prefer to grow in room temperature places rich with oxygen and moisture. Given a little time, carved pumpkins are the perfect place to grow a bacteria.



In fact, the best pumpkins for eating are the sweet mini and mammoth varieties, not the ones grown for jack-o-lanterns. Whole ripe pumpkins should be stored in a cool, dry spot until ready to use. Under these conditions, pumpkins will keep for a month or two. Once the shell has been cut, pumpkins should be covered in an airtight container and refrigerated.

Celebrating with Cider

Cider is a popular holiday beverage. For years, it was believed that cider didn't need to be pasteurized because it was too acidic an environment for most bacteria. Then, in the 1980's and 1990's, Canada and the U.S. both investigated cases where cider was implicated after people became infected with E. coli O157:H7. The E. coli organism is common in cows. It can get into cider if the apples, collecting baskets, or cider making equipment come in contact with manure. That can easily happen if livestock have gotten into the

orchard even months before or if windfalls are collected for the press.

Most cider sold in grocery stores is pasteurized and safe to drink. Since unpasteurized apple cider or mulled cider may contain harmful bacteria, it is best to avoid these beverages. As a precaution, always check to see that the cider has been pasteurized before purchasing.

**Avoid
unpasteurized
cider**

Sampling Cookie Dough

What is better than the smell of fresh baked cookies? These special treats are also fun to make. Children love to be part of the process and cooking can be a great learning experience. Children love to taste the cookie dough, but remember that eating raw cookie dough or tasting raw cake batter made with raw eggs is risky. Both children and adults can be at risk for



foodborne illness from salmonella poisoning, but children are at a greater risk because their immune systems are not fully developed. Cooking the food product to an internal temperature of at least 160°F kills the bacteria. Refrigerating will not kill the bacteria, so do not think refrigerated dough is safe to sample.

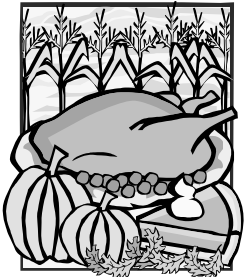
Food Safety Tips for Halloween

- Children shouldn't snack while they are out trick-or-treating, before adults have a chance to inspect the goodies. To help prevent children from munching, give them a snack or light meal before they go; don't send them out on an empty stomach.
- Tell children not to accept, and especially not to eat anything that isn't commercially wrapped.
- When children bring their treats home, discard any homemade candy or baked goods. Parents of young children should also remove any choking hazards such as gum, peanuts, hard candies, or small toys.
- Wash all fresh fruits thoroughly, inspect it for holes, including small punctures, and cut it open before allowing children to eat it.
- Inspect commercially wrapped treats for signs of tampering, such as an unusual appearance or discoloration, tiny pinholes, or tears in wrappers. Throw away anything that feels suspicious.
- If juice or cider is served to children at Halloween parties, make sure it is pasteurized. Juice or cider that has not been treated will say so on the label.

Tips provided by Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition · FDA



Planning for Your Holiday Meals



When planning a holiday meal or party, remember to plan for keeping hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Hot foods need to be kept above 140°F and cold foods need to be kept below 40° F. Temperature abuse is a common cause of foodborne

illness. On the buffet table, keep hot foods hot with chafing dishes, crock pots, and warming trays. Keep foods cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice. You can also use small serving dishes and replace them often. Never leave the food on the table for more than two hours. Don't plan to serve hot or cold foods, if you can't keep them hot or cold.

Good sanitation is critical. Serving, storing, and preparing large amounts of food increases the risk

for foodborne illness. Refrigerators are often overloaded. Poor sanitation in the kitchen can cause more problems than usual.

Cross-contamination is another major cause of foodborne illness. Any surface that food comes in contact with is a source of contamination. Cooking utensils, dishes, and cutting boards exposed to raw meat and/or poultry products should be thoroughly washed prior to use for any cooked foods to prevent cross-contamination.

Keep the basic food safety tips in mind to ensure a happy holiday.



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