



Food Safety Tips for Tailgating

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Tailgating and football. Food and football. These are really popular combinations in Hawaii. Did you know that “gridiron”—the nickname for a football field—refers to the grates of a barbecue grill? Unfortunately, microorganisms are always around to spoil your fun, and these challenging opponents can send you to the sidelines.

The best advice where food safety is concerned is to have a strong defense! Don't let those bugs get you down. Draw up a game plan to get your food from home to the stadium to the plates and keep it safe the whole time. Here are some tips on food safety for your tailgate parties.

Plan how the foods will be served:

- Consider single-serving packages of the food. Smaller amounts are easier to keep cold, and compared to large trays or bowls of food, individual servings reduce the chances of contamination by limiting the food's exposure to people.
- Foods with a short shelf life include fresh meats, milk and milk products (e.g., custards, puddings, and cream fillings), eggs, deli meats, potatoes, rice, pies, gravies, and stuffing—these all are potentially hazardous foods.
- Mayonnaise is an acidic food and is safe by itself, but when combined with other foods, such as in salads, the resulting mixture is not as acidic and is more susceptible to contamination by harmful microorganisms. Foods containing mayonnaise should be kept refrigerated.

Shop for the freshest produce and meats to help ensure food quality and safety.

Bring plenty of disposable plates, cups, utensils, serving plates, plastic bags, moist towelettes, soap in a dispenser, towels, and trash bags. Bring at least two insulated coolers—one for food that will be cooked and another for beverages. Since people will be helping themselves to drinks from the cooler, having separate coolers will keep the raw foods at safer, cooler temperatures until grill time.

Make sure you have plenty of fuel for your grill. You need to cook foods thoroughly to serve them safely. Pack a food thermometer if you have one.

Remember that ice is a food and you must keep ice to be consumed with drinks in a watertight container to separate it from the ice that is used to cool beverage containers.

Bring extra drinking water that may also be used to wash hands after handling raw food and before eating. Tailgating usually occurs in places where running water is not conveniently available.

Do as much preparation work as you can at home the night before. This will reduce the preparation time at the tailgate location, which is likely to be a less sanitary and a warmer environment than your kitchen, with limited workspace, materials, supplies, and access to a sink.

- Prewash all fruits and vegetables and keep them stored in the refrigerator until packing.
- Wash the rind of cantaloupes and other melons thoroughly before cutting. Cut melons should be well wrapped *and* kept refrigerated. They are not as acidic

as other fruits and have been known to cause foodborne illness when improperly stored.

- If the meats have been frozen, make sure they are completely and safely thawed *in the refrigerator* before taking them to the tailgate party.
- Meats that are marinating should be stored in the refrigerator. If you want to serve marinade as a sauce with the cooked meat, prepare an extra batch of marinade to be used **only** for this purpose, and store it separately.
- Precool all ingredients to be used to make foods that need to be refrigerated. For example, if you are serving tuna salad at the tailgate party, refrigerate all the necessary ingredients overnight—including the cans of tuna. This way, your food remains cold longer.

If you have several coolers, pack the foods in groups according to the order in which you will use them. Then you can open the coolers in stages. When you open the first cooler to remove the foods you need first, you won't have to disturb the other foods that need to stay cooler longer.

Put fresh meats and produce separately and securely in clean resealable plastic bags and store them in the refrigerator until you pack the coolers.

- Make sure no juice from the bagged fresh or marinating meats leaks out—pack these at the bottom of the cooler to prevent contamination of other foods.
- Pack fresh produce last so that it is on top of raw meats. It would even be safer if you packed raw meats separately from ready-to-eat foods, such as prepared salads, fresh fruits, and vegetables.

Allow plenty of time for your tailgate party, about 3–4 hours before game time, so that foods are cooked and served mindfully and safely. Keep all cooked foods in the cooler except during serving times.

- Hamburgers, sausages, and other ground meat (veal, lam, and pork) should be cooked to 160°F in the center (or until not pink inside but rather brown or gray).

- Ground poultry should be cooked to 165°F in the center (no pink inside).
- Beef, veal, and lamb steaks and roasts may be cooked to 145°F for medium rare.
- Poultry breast should be cooked to 170°F and dark meat to 180°F (no pink inside).
- All pork cuts should be cooked to 160°F (no pink inside).
- *Never* partially cook meats beforehand then take them to the stadium to finish cooking. The second partial cooking may not kill disease-causing microorganisms. It is safer to fully cook the meats beforehand, store them cold, then heat them up at the stadium before serving.

Ideally, you should cook just enough food so that there are no leftovers. Do not reuse marinades that you used for marinating meats. The safest thing to do with leftovers is to discard them. Before leaving the tailgate party, throw away perishable foods (including leftover cooked foods), unless they can be stored at 40°F or below. Their safety cannot be assured if they are kept above this temperature for more than 2 hours, even less in hot weather. *Remember—unsafe holding of food is the primary cause of foodborne illness.* After the game, serve only non-perishable foods, unless the perishables had been stored safely at 40°F or below.

Safe eating and happy tailgating!

Resources

http://www.americanplasticscouncil.org/Food_Safety/subjects/tailgate_safety_plan.html

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/foodsci/ext/pubs/picnic.html>

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsafety/consumers/index.cfm?articleID=155&parent=1>

<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/news/2002/tailgate.htm>

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