

Are you thinking of donating hot meals, fresh sandwiches or baked goods to families or communities in need?

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) wants to help you avoid the risk of food related illness. Food poisoning is a general term used to describe an illness that usually results from eating food or drinking water contaminated by disease-causing bacteria (germs) or their toxins (poisons). These bacteria may be naturally present or may enter foods that are improperly handled. Here are a few examples of food items that are more likely to cause food poisoning if they are not handled properly:



- Raw or undercooked meats (including poultry), eggs and fish
- Cooked and processed meats, poultry, eggs, fish and rice
- Gravies, soups and casseroles
- Sandwiches and salads containing mayonnaise, meats and eggs
- Milk and dairy products

When donating these food items, follow OPH's "**Tips for preparing food**" to kill or reduce the number of food poisoning bacteria that may be present in the foods you donate.

Food Donation FAQ's

Q. I want to prepare a hot meal (e.g. chili) in a slow cooker to share with the community, is this a safe way to prepare the food?

A. Yes, but only if the meat has reached a safe internal cooking temperature before it is added to the slow cooker. Use a probe thermometer to check the temperature for all foods containing meat, fish or eggs. For example, ground beef must reach an internal temperature of 71°C and chicken 74°C. (See chart on "**Tips for preparing food**")

Q. I want to leave a hot meal at the community centre for people to enjoy but I do not want to leave my slow cooker there, what should I do?

A. The safest way to serve a hot meal is to keep and transport hot foods at 60°C or higher. Tape your name and phone number to the slow cooker so that you can be contacted once the event is over.

Q. The community centre no longer has room to properly store my cold food items, should I just leave them on the counter?

A. No. The safest way to store cold food items is at 4°C. Bring your cold food items (e.g. sandwiches or salads) in a cooler with ice. Tape your name and phone number to the cooler so that you can be contacted once the event is over.

Q. If I prepared a home cooked meal (e.g. casseroles, quiche, chicken pot pie, etc.) and left it out on the counter overnight to cool, is it safe to serve?

A. No. These foods should be thrown out. All of these foods (casseroles, quiche, chicken pot pies) contain potentially hazardous ingredients such as meat or dairy and should therefore not be left at room temperature for more than two (2) hours.

Q. If I had sandwiches/ meat pies stored in the refrigerator and they smelled and tasted fine, but I am unsure of their preparation date, can I still serve them?

A. It is impossible to tell by the taste, smell, or appearance of the food if it contains harmful bacteria. Food poisoning bacteria, unlike spoilage bacteria, do not affect the colour, odour or taste of foods. Meat pies can be kept safely in the refrigerator at 4°C for up to three (3) days. If you are unsure of how old a prepared dish is, it is best to be cautious and throw it out.



For more information about preparing safe food items for donation visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca or call **613-580-6744** to speak with a Public Health Inspector.