

## Buffet Food Service Requirements for Caterers and Restaurants

Many restaurants and caterers offer buffet style meals. Buffets allow for efficient food service for groups. If proper equipment and safe food handling procedures are in place buffets are safe. However, certain risks are associated with this type of service, as the food you offer is now exposed to contamination by patrons visiting your buffet line.

### To limit the risk the following criteria must be met:

- All hazardous foods must be held at proper temperatures i.e. hot holding at a minimum of 60°C (140°F), cold holding at a maximum of 4°C (40°F). These temperatures are to be maintained during distribution, storage, transportation, display and sale of the food.
- Monitor temperatures frequently using a sanitized probe thermometer. Record the temperature.
- If ice is used to keep foods cold, it must be made from potable water and handled in a manner to prevent contamination. Melted ice must drain away from food. Containers of food must be completely surrounded by ice. Food must never be placed directly on ice, but placed on a clean serving platter.
- All foods must be protected from contamination and adulteration.
- All hazardous food displayed for sale or service must be protected against contamination by means of covered containers, sneeze guards, shields or shelves.
- Food must only be placed in food grade containers.
- Where possible staff who have washed their hands, should serve the requested food to patrons using clean and sanitary utensils. This practice reduces the risk of patrons contaminating utensils and food.
- If patrons serve themselves, ensure sufficient long handled utensils are available. Have a plate by the food to place the utensil on when not in use to prevent handles from contacting the food and contaminating it.
- Have a sign at the beginning of the buffet line that indicates expected buffet etiquette (for suggestions see Buffet Food Safety Fact Sheet).
- Do not add new food to containers on display. Remove the old and replenish with a fresh supply in a clean container.
- Ensure sufficient plates and utensils are available. Remove used empty plates from tables to ensure patrons do not enter the buffet line for refills using a soiled plate.
- Transport food in approved clean containers. Food must be transported in enclosed containers that prevent contamination of food and maintain the food at the prescribed temperatures.

- Transportation vehicles are considered part of the food premises when delivering food. Ensure they are clean before loading food, dishes and other required supplies.
- Do not prepare large amounts of food days ahead of the function. Ensure if large batches of food must be cooked and cooled that the food is transferred into shallow containers to allow for quick and proper cooling.
- Let us help you provide safe food handling training for your staff. Visit our website for food handler training options. Well trained staff is essential to prevent foodborne illness.



For more information, please call the  
Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit's  
Health ACTION Line at **1-800-660-5853**  
or visit our website at **[www.healthunit.org](http://www.healthunit.org)**