

Have you let out that huge sigh of relief now that the last of the Thanksgiving turkey has been eaten and the pumpkin pie is finally gone? Well, don't get too relaxed, because the Christmas holiday is fast approaching! If you are planning that annual Christmas party or just your family holiday dinner, keep in mind that special steps are necessary to ensure food safety for your holiday entertaining.

According to Peggy Van Laanen, Professor and Extension Nutrition Specialist at Texas A&M University, the thing you should be most concerned about is the temperature of meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, dressing, gravy, cream pies, pudding, and dishes made with these foods. Dips or sauces made with dairy products are also hazardous if held for long periods at room temperature.

When serving your holiday dishes keep the following points in mind:

Keep hot foods hot. Chafing dishes may or may not keep foods at the necessary temperature (140 degrees F or above). Never leave hot foods out for more than 2 hours.

Put small quantities of food on the table. Replace them often from the heat source in the kitchen or from the refrigerator.

Keep all perishable foods refrigerated until serving.

Leftovers from a buffet should be discarded.

Make your holiday food events special and safe by following the 4 C's guidelines:

Keep everything CLEAN during food handling.

Keep foods CHILLED.

COOK foods thoroughly.

Avoid CROSS-CONTAMINATION – the movement of bacteria from raw protein foods to cooked foods, or those to be eaten fresh.

Keep these simple steps in mind as you start your party planning and you will ensure the success of your party.

Don't forget about the "Baubles & Bows Holiday Program" this Friday, November 30, 2007 at 10:00 a.m. at the Rains County Fairgrounds. If you need further information, please contact the Texas Cooperative Extension office at 903/473-5000, ext. 157. Hope to see you there!

Classic Cooked Eggnog

6 eggs

1/4 cup sugar

1/4 teaspoon salt, optional

1 quart milk,* divided

1 teaspoon vanilla

Garnishes or stir-ins, optional

In large saucepan, beat together eggs, sugar and salt (if desired). Stir in 2 cups of milk. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until mixture thickens and just coats a metal spoon. Remove from heat. Stir in remaining 2 cups milk and vanilla.

Cool quickly and refrigerate covered until thoroughly chilled (several hours or overnight). Just before serving, pour into bowl or pitcher. Garnish or add stir-ins, if desired. Serve immediately.

Makes 1½ quarts or 12 (½-cup) servings.

*For faster preparation, heat milk until very warm before stirring milk into eggs and sugar.

Garnishes and Stir-ins (Choose one or several.)

Chocolate curls, extracts or flavorings, maraschino cherries, fruit juice or nectar, whipping cream, peppermint sticks, candy canes, ground nutmeg, cinnamon sticks.

This is a kitchen-tested recipe from the American Egg Board.