

HEALTH ALERT!

Don't Let Bacteria Reign Over Your Shower

(NAPSA)—Bridal showers, baby showers, graduation parties; it is the time for these festive celebrations. However, buffets and potlucks are also places where foodborne bacteria can crash the party.

Don't let bacteria reign over your celebration. The bride, the new mother, the graduate or other guest of honor will not appreciate the gift of food-borne illness. Even worse, pregnant women, exhausted brides, and graduates worn out from final exam study are at risk from a severe case of bacterial illness. But the hostess or host certainly doesn't want any guest to take home a food-borne illness.

Observe Safe Food Handling Techniques

Bacteria are everywhere, but a few types especially like to crash parties. *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Clostridium perfringens* and *Listeria monocytogenes* frequent people's hands and food warmers. And unlike microorganisms that cause food to spoil, harmful or pathogenic bacteria cannot be smelled or tasted.

As basic as it sounds, hand washing is one of the best ways to avoid illnesses. Always wash your hands before and after handling food. Keep your kitchen, dishes and utensils clean also. Follow these other safe food handling techniques for a safe celebration:

- Cook foods thoroughly to safe minimum internal temperatures: beef, veal and lamb steaks, roasts and chops, 145°F; pork to 160°F; ground meats, 160°F; and all poultry, 165°F.

- Divide hot, cooked foods into shallow containers for rapid, even cooling to store in the refrigerator or freezer until serving.

- Reheat hot foods to 165°F.

- Always serve food on clean plates—not those previously hold-



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ing raw meat and poultry. Bacteria present in raw meat juices can cross contaminate cooked food.

- Arrange and serve food on several small platters rather than on one large platter.

- Keep hot food hot in the oven (set at 200–250°F) until serving time.

- Serve hot foods at 140°F or warmer using chafing dishes, slow cookers and warming trays.

- Foods should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours. Discard anything left out for two hours or more.

- REPLACE empty platters rather than adding fresh food to a dish that already held food at room temperature.

- Keep cold foods at 40°F (refrigerator temperature) or colder. Serve cold foods by nesting dishes in bowls of ice, or use small serving trays and replace them.

For more food safety information about meat, poultry or egg products, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at (888) MPHOTline, or (888) 674-6854; type a question into "Ask Karen" (www.AskKaren.gov); go to www.fsis.usda.gov; or go to www.befoodsafe.gov.