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Don't invite unwanted guests to your Super Bowl buffet

Even though Super Bowl Sunday is not an official holiday, millions of Americans celebrate the day with family and friends. In fact, Super Bowl Sunday is the second-largest day of food consumption in the United States after Thanksgiving. However, unlike a sit-down dinner, most Super Bowl parties feature buffet-style fare.

If you are planning a Super Bowl party, make sure to follow the food safety playbook to ensure that everyone enjoys the party, no matter who wins or loses, and nobody goes home sick. A popular way to celebrate holidays or any party occasion is to invite friends and family to a buffet. However, this type of food service, where foods may be out for long periods leaves the door open for uninvited guests -- bacteria that cause foodborne illness. A simple way to remember safe food practices to think of four simple words: Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill.

Below is a game plan on how to host a champion-caliber get-together:

Illegal use of hands

Avoid penalties for "illegal use of hands." Unclean hands are one of the biggest culprits for spreading bacteria, and finger foods at parties are especially vulnerable. Chefs and guests should wash their hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before and after handling food. Also, be sure to clean eating surfaces often, and wash serving platters before replenishing them with fresh food.

Offsides

Think of your party fare as two different teams—uncooked versus ready-to-eat foods. Prevent "encroachment" at all costs and keep each team in its own zone. The juices from raw meat can contain harmful bacteria that cross-contaminate other food. Use one cutting board for raw meat and poultry and another one for cutting veggies or foods that will not be cooked. If you use only one cutting board, wash it with hot soapy water after preparing each food item.

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Equipment violations and holding

Call a "time out" and use a food thermometer to be sure meat and poultry are safely cooked. Remember that internal temperature, not meat color, indicates doneness. Steaks should be cooked to 145 °F, ground beef should be cooked to 160 °F, and all poultry should be cooked to 165 °F. "Holding" may be one of the most likely offenses your referee encounters if your party lasts late into the night. Never hold foods for more than two hours at room temperature. Refrigerate or freeze leftovers promptly to block offensive bacteria from multiplying. The same rules apply for cold foods. If cold food has been sitting out for more than two hours, do not eat it. When in doubt, throw it out of the game—and your party.

False start

When it comes to foodborne illness, there is no opportunity for an instant replay. To avoid these infractions, make sure you understand the rules completely.

More food safety tips are available at www.kanehealth.com. Also, on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Web site at www.fda.gov. A good resource available before kickoff is USDA's virtual representative, "Ask Karen," available at AskKaren.gov. Food safety coaches are available Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET on the "Ask Karen Chat" and by phone at the USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854). Recorded messages are available 24 hours a day.

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