

Long-Term Care Survey Alert

Prevent a Potluck From Turning Unlucky

Simple steps can ease safety and survey risks

With all the talk of person-centered care and home-like environments, offering potluck dinners seems like just the ticket. "Potlucks are a big tradition in many areas of the country, and for residents who may have regularly attended these at church," says **Diana Waugh, RN, BSN**, a survey consultant in Waterville, Ohio. Yet Waugh has heard of nursing homes that no longer host potlucks due to fear of food safety violations -- or they do so in a secretive way. Facilities can, however, honor resident/family wishes to participate in such events, Waugh believes. But "the impetus for doing a potluck should come from the resident or family councils," she says.

A few savvy risk management strategies can keep such events safe. The best bet might be to host a simulated potluck that the facility actually caters. That can work, says Waugh, although "it doesn't meet families' needs to contribute and for a resident to have his family members bring their famous dish."

Another option: Have trained staff prepare potentially hazardous foods onsite, suggests **Laurie Diaby-Gassama**, a public health sanitarian at Saint Croix County-Public Department in Wisconsin, who teaches a potluck safety course for community organizations. Families and staff preparing items in their own kitchens can bring the non-hazardous food menu items. You can also keep a "potluck event log" that identifies who brought what, as well as food receiving, holding and cooking temperatures, Diaby-Gassama tells **Eli**.

Put it in writing: Develop policies and procedures for food safety during potluck events, suggests Waugh. Also give residents the option of having their usual meal service if they don't wish to attend a potluck, she adds.