



## Be safe: Keep cream pies cool

**I made a chocolate cream pie for guests this weekend. We left it out on the counter for most of the afternoon, and one of my guests told me that I should have kept it refrigerated, and since I didn't, we should throw it away. Was she right?**

If you allowed the pie stay at room temperature (above 40 degrees Fahrenheit) for more than two hours, then, yes, she was right.

Standard food safety guidance warns against allowing perishable foods such as cream pies to stay in the “danger zone” — between 40 degrees and 140 degrees F — for more than two hours. After that amount of time, if there are any microorganisms that could cause foodborne illness lurking in the food, they are able to multiply so rapidly that they would be more likely to cause problems.

Experts say that after cooking cream pies, you should let them cool at room temperature for just 30 minutes, then put them in the refrigerator to complete cooling. They should be kept refrigerated except when you serve them.

Fruit pies — your standard apple, cherry or peach pie, for example — can safely be left at room temperature. But cream and custard pies are a different story. They normally contain ingredients such

as eggs, milk, cream or cream cheese that need to be treated with extra care. And their moisture content is much higher, too, which makes them even more prone to the growth of bacteria and other microbes.

According to the Food and Drug Administration’s “Bad Bug Book” (a handbook on foodborne microorganisms), one of the organisms that cream pies are susceptible to is *Staphylococcus aureus*, or Staph. Staph is very common in the environment, and it can make toxins that might not be destroyed by cooking.

Obviously, illness doesn’t always occur when food isn’t handled properly. But if it does occur with Staph, it comes fast, within one to seven hours after eating. Symptoms include nausea, stomach cramps, vomiting and diarrhea, with severe cases causing dehydration, headache, muscle cramps, and even temporary changes in blood pressure and heart rate. The illness normally is over within a day — sometimes just a few hours.

Besides cooking and storing food properly, you can help keep food safe by washing your hands thoroughly (and often) as you prepare and serve food, and by keeping utensils and surfaces clean. For more details, download a fact sheet from Ohio State University Extension at <http://go.osu.edu/staphPDF>.

*Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu).*



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