

HOPKINS COUNTY



, KY - With Thanksgiving right around the corner - and food generally a large part of the celebration – the Department for Public Health (DPH) wants the public to keep safe health practices in mind.

Many holiday dinners incorporate meat and poultry, a possible source of foodborne disease unless properly handled and prepared. This holiday season, DPH urges consumers to take precautions in purchasing and preparing food items and to pay close attention to good hygiene practices.

“The principles of food safety aren’t just for restaurants,” said Mark Reed, manager of DPH’s food safety branch. “The home cook needs to follow a few sound practices to keep friends and loved ones safe from foodborne illness this holiday season.”

Holiday buffets, party trays or even a poorly stored turkey could be the culprit of disease. Improperly stored food items provide breeding grounds for bacterial contamination, which causes illness that affects an average of 76 million people each year.

Here are a few simple food safety tips to avoid getting sick during the holiday season:

Safe Storage Temperatures

- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Hot foods should be held at 135 degrees Fahrenheit or warmer, while cold foods should be kept at least 41 degrees Fahrenheit or below.
- Foods that sit out on the buffet table for longer than two hours should be discarded.

Safe Food Handling

- Always wash your hands before and after handling food.

- Use two cutting boards. One should be used for preparing raw meat, poultry and fish and the other for cutting cooked food or preparing salads.
- Wash fruits and vegetables before preparing.
- Keep your kitchen, dishes and utensils clean.
- Never put cooked food back on plates or platters where raw meat or poultry were previously stored.
- Wash and sanitize food contact surfaces often.
- To sanitize utensils, immerse for 30 seconds in clean, hot, soapy water.
- Never thaw the turkey on the counter. Thawing at room temperature increases the risk of bacteria growth at the surface even though the interior may still be chilled.
- Thaw turkey in a refrigerator with a temperature of 41 degrees Fahrenheit or below. The turkey should be thawed in its original wrap, on a tray placed in the bottom section of the refrigerator.
- A turkey can also be placed under cool running water at a temperature of 75 degrees Fahrenheit or less, or thawed in a microwave, provided the turkey is cooked immediately.

Cook thoroughly

- If you are cooking foods ahead of time for your party, be sure to cook foods thoroughly to a safe minimum internal temperature.
- Use a metal stemmed meat thermometer to determine when the turkey is done by inserting the thermometer in the thickest part of the turkey thigh. When the thermometer reaches between 165-180 degrees Fahrenheit, the turkey is done.
- Safe cooking temperatures for other foods are as follows: seafood, 145 degrees Fahrenheit; pork, 160 degrees Fahrenheit; ground beef, veal, lamb and pork, 160 degrees Fahrenheit; other poultry products, 165 degrees Fahrenheit; and ground turkey and chicken, 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

Leftovers

- Leftovers should be stored in the refrigerator within two hours after cooking is complete.
- Leftovers should be divided into smaller portions and stored in several shallow containers.
- Use refrigerated turkey and stuffing within three to four days. Use gravy within one to two days.
- Frozen leftovers should be eaten within two to six months.
- Reheat all leftovers to 165 degrees Fahrenheit throughout or until steaming hot. Soups, sauces and gravies should be brought to a rolling boil for at least one minute.

Most importantly, if you are unsure if a food has been stored safely and is still good, it's best to follow the old food safety maxim of "when in doubt, throw it out," said Reed.

For more information, visit <http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/info/phps/food.htm> , or contact Pam Hendren, (502) 564- 7181, ext. 3715, or Mark Reed, (502) 564-7181, ext. 3677.

Information provided to iSurf News by the Kentucky Health and Family Services Cabinet.
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