

# Holiday Cooking Safety

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## Holiday cooking time

The time we share at meals with our loved ones can make some of the best memories, or some of the most uncomfortable. The risk of foodborne illness during the holidays can be reduced if some basic food safety guidelines are followed.

## Food safety facts

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that there are 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths related to foodborne diseases each year. A total of 76 million cases of foodborne illnesses are estimated each year. The majority of which are not serious or life-threatening. Foodborne illness, or food poisoning, is the result of eating food contaminated with certain bacteria, viruses, or parasites. Examples of some of the organisms which cause foodborn illness include *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, *E. coli*, and *Listeria monocytogene*. These organisms are often found in raw or undercooked meat and dairy products as well as some fruits and vegetables.

## How would I feel if I had food poisoning?

Symptoms of food poisoning include cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and fever. Most people recover completely from foodborne illness, but some groups are at greater risk of serious health effects, such as kidney problems. People at greater risk include children, pregnant women, the elderly and people with weakened/compromised immune systems.

## How can we minimize the risk of foodborne illness during the holidays?

Here are some tips to help you reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses as you plan for the holidays:

- **Thawing:** Proper thawing methods include using refrigeration, rapidly cooking directly from the frozen state, rapidly microwaving then cook immediately afterward or return immediately to cold storage, or unwrapped and completely submerged under running water at 70°F. Do not allow thawed portion of food product to rise above 41°F for more than four hours. If a turkey is thawed too quickly, the meat on the outside will be cooked before the inside. In this situation, the inside of the turkey might not reach the temperature necessary to kill disease-causing bacteria. This is why it is important to allow a frozen turkey time to thaw properly.
- **Cooking Temperatures:** Ensure that food is cooked to the proper temperature. This can be accomplished by inserting a meat thermometer probe into several areas of the food to ensure each item reaches the following minimum internal temperatures for safe consumption:

- Poultry 165°F
- Reheated foods 165°F
- Ground beef 155°F
- Pork 145°F
- Fish 145°F
- Steak 130°F



# *Holiday Cooking Safety –Continued*

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Cooking food at the correct temperature will prevent any bacteria from causing a foodborne illness.

- **Cooling:** Chill food immediately by keeping the refrigerator at 41°F or below to prevent the food item from reaching the “danger zone” of food items remaining at temperatures between 41°F and 135°F. This prevents the growth of bacteria over time. So, put leftovers in the refrigerator within two hours.
- **Proper cleaning:** Clean food contact surfaces (e.g., any surface which touched or may have touched potentially hazardous items) and utensils with bleach and water often to avoid the spread of bacteria. Use one teaspoon of bleach per gallon of water.
- **Traveling with food:** Keep hot foods hot (at or above 135°F) and cold foods cold (at or below 41°F). Transport hot food in insulated containers with hot packs. Transport cold food in a cooler with ice and/or freezer packs.

It is important to practice good hand washing in the home kitchen to avoid spreading foodborne illness to family members.

Follow these steps to be sure you are using proper hand washing technique:

- Use soap and warm running water.
- Rub your hands vigorously under the running water for a minimum of 20 seconds.
- Wash all hand surfaces, including the back of your hands, wrists, between fingers, and under fingernails.
- Rinse your hands thoroughly under warm running water.
- Dry your hands with paper towels. Cloth towels can be used but they must be single-use only because cloth towels allow germs on the towel to re-contaminate your washed hands.

Every time raw meat products are handled, your hands must be washed. Your hands must also be washed before you handle any fresh fruits and vegetables. It is easy to cross-contaminate ready-to-eat foods such as salad ingredients and bread by first handling raw meat and not washing your hands before other items are handled. If you make a simple habit of washing your hands properly and routinely, you can ensure the safety of your family as you prepare food in your home kitchen.

**Enjoy and Happy Holidays!**



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