

Spread joy, not germs, this holiday season

For many the holiday season means a time to enjoy good company and good food. As we spread the joy of the season we need to be extra careful to not spread food-borne illness causing bacteria. These simple food safety tips will help you prepare a safe and tasty holiday meal:

Store and thaw safely: Keep fresh turkey refrigerated no longer than three days before cooking. There are three ways to thaw frozen turkey in its wrapper:

- Under cold running water (one hour per pound)
- In a clean sink full of cold water, changing the water every couple of hours
- In the fridge (five hours per pound)
- Thawing poultry at room temperature is not recommended because it allows harmful bacteria to grow.
- Keep other items, especially those with meat, seafood, dairy, eggs or other moist, protein-rich foods chilled until served.

Clean carefully: Wash your hands, utensils and work surfaces well before prep work begins. Once the preparation work is done, clean surfaces in hot soapy water, rinse, then sanitize. Sanitizing can be done with a diluted bleach solution (30 ml of bleach per gallon of water) that is allowed to sit for two minutes. Wash your hands well after cleaning the cutting board and before and after working with any new menu items.

Avoid cross contamination: Store raw meat away from food that is ready-to-eat, including fruit and vegetables (and be sure to wash these thoroughly before serving). Turkeys should be wrapped well and stored on the lowest shelf of your fridge or in the meat keeper to keep blood and juices from contaminating other food. Ensure only clean utensils and cutting boards are used. Use a separate cutting board to prepare raw meat. Wash hands after handling any raw foods and minimize hand contact during final preparation steps.

Cook well: For turkey, set the oven at no lower than 350 °F (177 °C) and cook for about 20 minutes per pound. Use a good meat thermometer to measure the turkey's internal temperature and ensure it's safe to eat. All parts of the bird including stuffing should be at least 165°F (74°C) when removed from the oven. Health Canada recommends an internal temperature of 185°F (85 °C) at the thickest part of the meat as additional assurance. Check the temperature in several places to be sure. Cooked food should be kept at 140 °F (60 °C) while waiting to serve.

Refrigerate: Chill food immediately after returning from the store and soon after dinner is complete. Perishable food should be placed in the refrigerator within two hours of being removed from the oven. Refrigerate at 40°F (4°C) or in a freezer at 0°F (-18 °C). Health Canada recommends refrigerating leftovers for no more than two to three days. Put them in the freezer in order to keep them longer.

Have a happy and healthy holiday season!

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