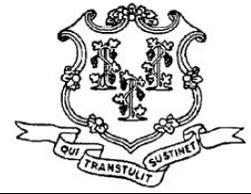


News



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DPH Offers Tips on Safely Preparing Your Holiday Meals

One in six Americans get sick from food poisoning each year

Hartford – The Department of Public Health (DPH) reminds Connecticut residents that food safety is especially important as they prepare holiday meals. Many holiday dinners include meat and poultry, a possible source of foodborne disease if not handled and prepared properly. This holiday season, DPH urges consumers to prevent foodborne illness and follow the basic principles of food safety and good hygiene when buying and preparing food items.

“One in six Americans will get sick from food poisoning this year. Most of them will recover without any lasting effects from their illness, but for some, the effects can be devastating and even deadly,” said Tracey Weeks, DPH Food Protection Program Coordinator. “That’s why it is so important when preparing meals to take precautions to make sure your food is safe to eat. Not preparing food safely could put you and your loved ones at risk for foodborne illness.”

Holiday buffets, party trays or even a poorly stored turkey can be the culprit of disease. Improperly stored food items provide breeding grounds for bacteria, which cause illness that affects an average of 48 million people across the country each year.

Here are a few food safety tips to help keep you and your loved ones healthy during the holiday season:

Wash hands - Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, and dry your hands with a paper towel following restroom use, before preparing foods, after handling raw meat and before eating. Clean hands will help prevent the spread of illness-causing bacteria.

Clean - Bacteria can spread and get onto cutting boards, knives and counter tops. Wash and sanitize food-contact surfaces often. Many home dishwashers now come with a sanitizing cycle option. If not, you can sanitize by immersing utensils, cutting boards, and other items that come in contact with food for at least one minute in a clean solution made of ½ tablespoon of unscented household bleach per gallon of water. Wash fruits and vegetables with water before preparing.

Thaw properly - Proper methods for thawing a turkey include: thawing in a refrigerator with a temperature of 41° F or less (allow 3-4 days for thawing); placing under cool running water at a temperature of 75 °F or less; or thawing in a microwave and cooking the turkey immediately.

Take temperatures - Cook your turkey at 325° F until its internal temperature reaches at least 165° F. Cooked, hot foods should be kept at 140° F or warmer. Be sure to use a food

thermometer to check temperatures. When cooking a stuffed turkey, be sure that the turkey, as well as the stuffing inside of it, reaches at least 165° F. Even if the turkey itself reaches 165° F, the temperature safe enough to kill any bacteria that may be present, the stuffing inside may take longer to reach 165° F.

Stuffing - Prepare your stuffing and turkey just before cooking. Using a cold stuffing may make it more difficult to reach the safe temperature of 165° F. Stuff the turkey loosely and use ¾ of a cup of stuffing per pound of turkey. Use a moist stuffing rather than a dry stuffing because heat destroys bacteria better in a moist environment. For a safer approach, cook stuffing separately.

Keep it cold - Cold foods should be kept at 41° F or less. After the turkey is served, immediately slice and refrigerate on shallow platters. Store leftover food in shallow containers and refrigerate promptly. Use refrigerated turkey and stuffing within three to four days. Use gravy within one to two days. If freezing leftovers, use within two to six months for best quality.

Transport safely - Keep hot foods hot (140° F or above) and cold foods cold (41° F or less).

Reheat - Leftover turkey and stuffing should be stored separately in shallow dishes or platters. Rapidly reheat leftovers to a minimum internal temperature of 165° F.

Don't cross contaminate - Put the turkey directly into the roasting pan as you remove it from the wrapper to avoid contaminating the sink and other surfaces with bacteria that are often present on poultry. Don't touch other foods with hands or utensils that have been used on raw poultry without properly washing your hands first. Washing your hands, wearing disposable gloves, and changing them after handling raw foods is the safest way to prevent cross contamination.

Don't cook if you're ill - Don't prepare foods if you are experiencing symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea or if you recently had such symptoms. Many foodborne illnesses are transmitted unknowingly by a food preparer who had these symptoms – even if they washed their hands! If you are ill, let someone else do the cooking and provide a safe and enjoyable dinner for your family and friends.

For more information and free literature about food safety, contact the Food Protection Program at (860) 509-7297.

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