Food Safety During Holidays

Enjoying good food is a predominant part of the holiday season. Consider safely preparing, cooking, and serving meals to protect family and friends from foodborne illness.

To make sure you and your family stay safe and avoid foodborne illness this holiday season, there are some simple guidelines you can follow, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The most common symptoms of foodborne illness are diarrhea, vomiting, and flu-like symptoms, starting hours or days after contaminated food or drink is consumed.

Practicing basic food safety measures can help prevent foodborne illness. These steps in order are clean, separate, cook, and chill.

1. Clean:

The first step to safe food preparation is to keep everything clean.

Always wash hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before and after handling any food. Avoid touching food with bare hands.

Wash food-contact surfaces using hot, soapy water after preparing each food item so it is clean for the next ingredient you prepare.

Always rinse all vegetables and fruits thoroughly under cool running water. To remove all surface dirt, use a produce brush.

Never rinse raw meat or poultry before cooking. Washing raw meat and poultry increases the chance of bacteria spreading around the sink and countertops.

2. Separate:

Do not allow bacteria to spread from one food to another.

Make sure to keep raw meat, eggs, poultry, seafood, and their juices away from cooked or fresh foods.

Use one cutting board only for raw meat, a second one for fresh produce, and a third cutting board for ready-to-eat foods. Wash cutting boards in hot soapy water between uses.

While prepping food, keep fruits and vegetables that will be eaten raw separate from other foods such as raw meat, poultry, or seafood, and kitchen utensils used for those products.

Do not put cooked meat, poultry, or seafood onto an unwashed plate containing raw eggs, meat, seafood, poultry, or their juices.

3. Cook:

Food has been safely cooked once the internal temperature is high enough to kill all harmful bacteria.

Use a food thermometer to ensure meat, poultry, and fish are cooked to a minimum safe internal temperature.

Do not eat raw dough or batter. Raw doughs contain uncooked eggs and flour, which can contain bacteria that are only killed when the dough is fully cooked.

Eggs should be cooked until the yolk and white are firm. When making recipes with raw eggs, use liquid or frozen pasteurized egg products, pasteurized shell eggs, or powdered egg whites.

Keep hot foods hot (140ºF or higher).

Reheat cooked leftovers to 165°F.

4. Chill:

Your fridge should be below 40°F, and the freezer should be set at 0°F.

Never thaw food at room temperature! Food can be thawed safely in the refrigerator, under cold running water, or microwave.

Keep cold foods cold (40ºF or colder) by nesting dishes in bowls of ice or using small serving trays and replacing them often.

Refrigerate or freeze perishable, temperature-sensitive food within 2 hours or discard it.

Do not taste food that looks or smells questionable. A good rule to follow - when in doubt is to throw it out!

Holiday food safety tips can ensure you have a healthy holiday season. Festive times for giving and sharing should not include sharing foodborne illnesses.

(Sources: www.cdc.gov; www.fda.gov; foodsafety.ces.ncsu.edu; https://www.fsis.usda.gov)