

Food For Your Soul: Be “Food Safe” During the Holidays

Food is always an important part of holiday festivities. But holiday meals can take a turn for the worse if food safety isn't a regular ingredient in preparing and cooking the food. The food you serve your family can be very harmful if your turkey, ham, gumbo, crab dip and home-prepared meatballs aren't handled safely or refrigerated promptly.



Foodborne disease infections continue to be a serious health issue in the United States, causing an estimated 76 million people to become sick each year. The most common foodborne diseases associated with meat, poultry and fish are *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, and *E. coli*. Most people become sick by eating contaminated foods or beverages or by coming in contact with someone who has a foodborne illness. Pregnant women, older adults, infants and young children, and those with weakened immune systems are at higher risk for severe infections.

Remember, be “food safe” during the holidays by following the four basic steps of food safety: *Clean*, *Separate*, *Cook*, and *Chill*.

- ✓ **CLEAN** Remember to wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before and after handling food. Handwashing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of foodborne illness. Wash all kitchen utensils, dishes, and countertops with hot water and soap.
- ✓ **SEPARATE** Try to use one cutting board for raw meat, poultry, and seafood and a separate one for fresh produce. Keep fish and seafood, raw turkey, roasts, hams, and other meats and their juices separate from other side dishes when preparing meals.
- ✓ **COOK** Cook meat and poultry to a safe minimum internal temperature: turkey, stuffing, casseroles, and leftovers to 165°F; beef, veal and lamb roasts to 145°F; “fully cooked” ham to 140°F and fresh ham, pork, and egg dishes to

160°F. Use a food thermometer. If chitterlings are on your menu, boil the chitterlings for 5 minutes BEFORE cleaning and preparing them. Egg products can be substituted in recipes typically made with raw eggs, such as eggnog, custard, or key lime pie. Be sure that eggs and products containing eggs are thoroughly cooked when serving those at higher risk for foodborne illness.

- ✓ **CHILL** Chill food promptly. Keep the fridge at 40°F or below to prevent bacteria from growing. Custard pies and other egg dishes should always be kept cool. Put leftovers in the refrigerator within 2 hours. Remember to never defrost food at room temperature.

Remember, be “food safe” for the health of you and your family. Happy eating!

For more holiday food safety tips, visit the Food and Drug Administration online at www.fda.gov/consumer/updates/foodsafetytips111307.html.

For more food safety information about meat and poultry, call the U.S. Department of Agriculture's toll-free Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-674-6854. Get answers online from the virtual representative, “Ask Karen” at www.askkaren.gov, or visit the Be Food Safe Web site at www.befoodsafe.gov.

For more information on preventing foodborne illness, call Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Consumer Information Line at 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/foodborneinfections_g.htm.