



Food safety is the secret ingredient: IDPH offers tips for safe holiday cooking

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SPRINGFIELD – Whether you are making a signature dish or trying something new this holiday season, the secret ingredient is always food safety. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates 48 million people a year get sick from a foodborne illness, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die.

“While most healthy people who become sick with a foodborne illness, typically called food poisoning, will get better without seeing a doctor, others can experience severe illnesses,” said Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D., J.D. “By taking a few simple precautions, you can help protect yourself and those around you from an unhappy holiday.”

To make sure foodborne illness is not on the menu at your holiday party, adhere to the four food safety steps.

1. **Clean** - wash hands, cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and countertops before and after preparing each food item.
2. **Separate** - keep raw eggs, meat, poultry, seafood, and their juices away from foods that will not be cooked.
3. **Cook** - use a food thermometer to make sure meat, poultry, and fish are fully cooked. Color is not a reliable indicator of doneness. Cook turkey to an internal temperature of 165°F.
4. **Chill** - divide leftovers into shallow containers and refrigerate them within two hours. Use leftovers within three to four days.

Everyone loves to graze during the holidays, but when perishable food sits at room temperature, it is resting in a temperature range where bacteria love to multiply. This range, between 40-140°F, is known as the ‘danger zone.’ A good rule of thumb is, make

sure hot foods are hot (above 140°F) and cold foods are cold (below 40°F). If foods have been left out at room temperature for more than two hours, they should be discarded.

Safety precautions remain important this year, as the CDC continues to investigate two multistate [outbreaks of *Salmonella*](#) associated with poultry products. One is linked to raw turkey products and includes 164 cases in 35 states. Sixteen cases are reported among Illinois residents. Another involves multidrug-resistant *Salmonella* infections tied to raw chicken products and includes 92 people in 29 states. Five cases are reported among Illinois residents.

Always handle raw poultry carefully and cook it thoroughly to prevent food poisoning. These outbreaks are a reminder that raw poultry can have germs that spread around food preparation areas and make you sick. As you prepare holiday meals this year, be sure to follow these turkey-specific recommendations:

1. **Do not thaw at room temperature** - thaw your turkey in the refrigerator, in a sink of cold water that is changed every 30 minutes, or in the microwave. Never thaw your turkey by leaving it out on the counter. Allow approximately 24 hours for each four to five pounds of turkey when thawed in the refrigerator.
2. **Do not rinse or wash your turkey** - doing so can spread bacteria around the kitchen, contaminating countertops, towels, and other food.

Typical symptoms of foodborne illness include vomiting, diarrhea, and flu-like symptoms, which can start anywhere from hours to days after consuming contaminated food or drinks. Symptoms can last anywhere from a few hours to a few days. Those at risk of more severe and even life-threatening foodborne illness include older adults, infants, young children, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems. If you become ill, especially with severe symptoms, or if you are at risk for more severe disease, seek care from a medical provider to ensure a proper diagnosis and appropriate management.

More information on [Food Safety During The Holidays](#) can be found on the IDPH website.