

**MEDIA ADVISORY**

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**Holiday Food Safety**

**December 11, 2019,** Longview, TX)–The holiday season is here, and festive parties, gatherings, and family dinners are a normal event on your calendar and to do list. All the planning and excitement can bring holiday cheer, especially with delicious food around the table. But the fun can end soon if the foods you eat make you and others ill.

A foodborne illness is an **infection or uncomfortable irritation of the gastrointestinal tract caused by food or beverages that contain harmful bacteria, parasites, viruses, or chemicals.** Some common foodborne illness symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, and flu-like symptoms such as abdominal pain, fever, and chills. These symptoms can start within hours of eating contaminated food or drink and last a few hours to several days.

During holiday parties many dishes are left unattended for more time than recommended causing harmful bacteria to grow. If you are hosting a holiday party or preparing your favorite potluck dish this winter, make sure safe food-handling is practiced in the home.

Practicing four basic food safety rules can help prevent foodborne illness and keep you and your guests feeling festive this season," said Elaine Montemayor-Gonzalez, a Health Specialist with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.

**1. Clean**

Keep it clean!

* Wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling any food.
* Wash surfaces such as countertops, cutting boards, dishes, and utensils with hot, soapy water after preparing food items and also before use
* Rinse fruits and vegetables under cool running water and use a produce brush to remove surface dirt.
* Do not rinse raw meat and poultry (holiday turkey) before cooking. Rinsing these foods can make it more likely for bacteria to spread around sinks and on countertops.

**2. Separate**

Prevent cross contamination!

* Keep raw food away from cooked at all times. It is recommended that eggs, meat, poultry, seafood, and their juices be kept away from foods that won't be cooked. Use this rule while shopping in the store, when storing in your refrigerator (always store raw meat on the bottom of your refrigerator), and while preparing your favorite holiday meals.
* Consider using different colored cutting boards for foods that will be cooked (such as raw meat, poultry, and seafood) and for those that will not (such as raw fruits and vegetables).
* Do not serve cooked meat or other food that is ready to eat on an unwashed plate that has held any raw food.

**3. Cook**

Cook to kill harmful germs!

* Always use a food thermometer to make sure meat, poultry, and fish are cooked to a safe internal temperature. Foods should never be kept in the danger zone of 40F-140F. When cooking your turkey, insert a food thermometer into the innermost part of the thigh, wing and the thickest part of the breast. The turkey is safe to eat when the temperature reaches 165ºF. Always read instructions on holiday hams for proper cooking times and cooking per pound.
* Boil sauces, and gravies when reheating to kill any bacteria.
* Holiday Baking-always use pasteurized egg products and do not eat uncooked cookie dough, which may contain raw eggs.

**4. Chill:**

Keep it chill!

* Prepare for the large quantities of food in your fridge by installing an appliance thermometer. Set your refrigerator at or below 40F and the freezer at 0F.
* Food should be defrosted safely in the refrigerator, under cold running water, or in the microwave. Never leave food outside on a countertop to defrost. Once food is thawed in cold water or in the microwave, it should be cooked immediately.
* Allow the correct amount of time to properly thaw food. Your turkey this season should take at least 3-5 days to thaw completely when thawed in the refrigerator. Read instructions for proper thawing times per pound.
* Refrigerate leftovers and anytype of food that should be refrigerated within two hours. That includes pumpkin pie and pumpkin rolls!
* Leftovers should be reheated to 165 degrees F and used within 3 days.
* A good rule to follow about whether a food is safe to eat or not… “when in doubt, throw it out”

Following these food safety rules can help make your party and mealtimes a delicious and memorable time. If transporting a dish to your holiday get-together, keep it cold in a travel cooler and reheat at the party, or transport warm in an insulated container. Keep your food temperatures outside the danger zone. This winter remember to stay calm, clean your surroundings in the kitchen, read instructions and most of all have fun! Remember a food thermometer is always a good stocking stuffer idea!

For more information on planning your holiday feast safely, contact the Gregg County Extension Office at 903-236-8429 or via email gregg@ag.tamu.edu