



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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TIPS FOR A SAFE HOLIDAY FEAST

RALEIGH — State health officials are reminding North Carolinians to be safe during the holidays by taking extra care while preparing meals for upcoming holiday feasts.

“The holidays are a time of the year when food takes a prominent role in the festivities,” said Larry Michael, head of the Food Protection Branch in the state Division of Environmental Health. “Holiday food preparation often involves cooking special foods and cooking for large numbers of people, so it is important to keep food safety in mind. Improper food preparation can lead to food-borne illnesses, which could dampen these jovial times.”

The following tips will help keep your food safe as well as delicious:

- **Clean** — Wash your hands and cutting surfaces with soap and water often. Clean your food thermometer after using it. Bacteria can spread from knives, cutting boards and hands. Use paper towels to clean countertops rather than sponges.
- **Separate** — Separate raw and cooked/ready-to-eat foods to prevent the spread of bacteria during preparation and serving. If you have used a cutting board, platter or utensil on raw food, do not use it on cooked or ready-to-eat food unless you have first washed it in hot, soapy water.
- **Cook** — Cooking foods to a high enough temperature for a long enough time will kill harmful bacteria and prevent food-borne illness especially for raw meats, poultry and shellfish. Use a food thermometer when cooking meats and poultry to ensure they reach proper temperatures. Never partially cook food for finishing later because it may increase the risk of bacterial growth. Turkey needs to be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165 F as measured with a food thermometer. Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. Casseroles containing eggs should be cooked to an internal temperature of 160 F. Letting food temperatures drop below 135 F can allow bacteria to grow rapidly.
- **Chill** — Refrigerate foods within two hours; this will prevent bacteria from growing rapidly. This includes meats, cooked vegetables, custard pies such as sweet potato or pumpkin, and custard-filled cakes and pastry. Settings should be set to maintain 40 F for refrigerators and zero degrees in freezers. Large portions of meat, such as turkey, should be carved into smaller portions in order to cool more rapidly. Portions will cool quickly if they are not thicker than four inches.
- **Discard** — Food left out at room temperature for more than four hours should be discarded. Leftovers should be placed in shallow containers and refrigerated immediately.

Other holiday cooking tips include:

- If preparing pumpkin, sweet potato or other custard pies in advance, make sure they are cooled and stored properly (See “Chill” above).
- Do not partially cook food and hold food items for cooking later.
- Store food items appropriately as soon as possible.
- Do not eat raw cookie dough or batter made with raw eggs as raw eggs may contain bacteria that cause salmonellosis. Thorough cooking kills this bacteria.
- Do not drink eggnog made with raw eggs or unpasteurized cider or juices.
- If you are ill with sore throat, nausea, diarrhea or vomiting, do not prepare food as you may have a disease that can be transmitted through food.

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Turkey Tips

- Thawing and storing – Buying a fresh or frozen turkey is a personal preference, and there are different safety tips to keep in mind for each. Buy a fresh turkey no more than two days ahead of time and make sure you have space in the refrigerator to store it without contaminating other food with the juices from the bird. If you choose to buy a frozen turkey, thaw it in the refrigerator, allowing 24 hours for every five pounds. When storing and thawing a turkey in the refrigerator, always make sure the juices cannot contaminate other items by placing it on a platter or in a container that will catch any juices that may leak. Never thaw it on the kitchen counter. A securely wrapped frozen turkey can also be thawed in cold water, but be sure to change the water every 30 minutes and cook the turkey immediately after it is thawed.
- Cooking – Thawing a turkey completely before cooking is important. If it's not thawed, the outside of the turkey will be done before the inside is hot enough to kill harmful bacteria. The safest way to cook stuffing is separately from the turkey, but remember a stuffed turkey will require different cooking times. Regardless of whether it's inside or outside the turkey, the stuffing must reach a minimum internal temperature of 165 F when measured in the center with a food thermometer.

If you develop symptoms of food-borne illness such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or fever, contact your health care provider or local health department. Very young children, pregnant women, the elderly and people with compromised immune systems have an increased risk of developing serious illness, and should visit a health care provider immediately if they develop these symptoms.

From other turkey-related questions, the following hotlines are ready to answer questions:

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline	(800) 674-4555	www.fsis.usda.gov
Butterball Turkey Hotline	(800) 288-8372	www.butterball.com
Empire Kosher Poultry Hotline	(800) 367-4734	www.empirekosher.com
Foster Farms Turkey Help Line	(800) 255-7227	www.fosterfarms.com
HoneySuckle White Turkey	(800) 810-6325	www.honeysucklewhite.com
Reynolds Turkey Tip Line	(800) 745-4000	www.reynoldskitchens.com

For general food safety questions contact the following:

FDA Hotline	(888) 723-3366	www.cfsan.fda.gov/~lrd/tpholid.html
Food Safety		www.foodsafety.gov

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