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PRESS RELEASE

Holiday Food Safety

Food is an important part of many holiday celebrations but don't let food-related illness ruin your holiday. Food safety boils down to four basic rules; keep hot food hot and cold food cold, keep everything in the kitchen clean, wash hands frequently, and properly handled leftovers.

Hands should always be thoroughly washed with soap and warm water before handling food. Towels and wash cloths should be kept clean. Sponges are known for harboring bacteria, so eliminate or limit their use in the kitchen. Counter tops and utensils should be washed with hot, soapy water between each step in food preparation.

Thawing raw meats and turkeys on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator can help prevent raw meat juices from contaminating other foods. Start early, a 20-pound turkey will take about three days to thaw completely in a refrigerator.

Refrigerate cooked foods that are not served immediately. If food is left unrefrigerated longer than two hours, the chance of bacterial growth increases. Check your refrigerator to make sure it is at 41° F or less. When made with raw products, there are some foods that should be avoided altogether. These include oysters and egg drinks, mousse or bread pudding, unless made with pasteurized eggs or an egg substitute.

Be sure poultry reaches the temperature of 165° F or above to make sure it is cooked thoroughly. Use a meat thermometer to check the temperature. Insert the thermometer into the thickest part of the meat, avoiding fat and bone. For poultry, insert it into the thick part of the thigh next to the body. Wash and rinse the thermometer between uses to prevent possible contamination. Cook meat and poultry completely without interrupting the cooking process; an interruption could allow bacteria to grow.

After the meal, immediately refrigerate leftovers such as meat, dressing, gravy or soups in small shallow containers. Do not allow foods to sit several hours at room temperature as this will provide time for the growth of disease-causing bacteria. Refrigerate stuffing and other items separately from the bird. Eat refrigerated turkey within three to four days and stuffing and gravy within one to two days.

For more information please contact Julia Niziolek, Assistant Sanitarian at 815-432-2483.