

4 Simple Tips for Holiday Food Safety

As friends and family gather together during the holiday season you want to make sure that you keep out any unwelcome guests in the form of harmful foodborne bacteria. The following tips will ensure food safety and a great time for everyone at your table.

Happy Holidays and Merry Christmas!!

TIP # 1 - Wash your hands and clean all prep surfaces & tools regularly during food preparation.

Bacteria can survive in many places around your kitchen, especially on your hands, utensils and cutting boards. Unless you wash your hands, utensils and surfaces the right way, you could spread bacteria to your food and your family.

- Wash hands in warm water using hand soap for at least 20 seconds (singing two rounds of the ABC's should do it).
- Wash hard surfaces and utensils with warm soapy solution and rinse with clear water.
- Keep wash towels and dish cloths clean by laundering them often in the hot cycle of your washing machine. Soiled cloths are hot breeding ground for bacteria.
- Sponges should be washed and rinsed regularly. Use a mild chlorine bleach solution to disinfect and discard worn sponges. Sponges hold in a lot of bacteria and should be disinfected as often as possible.

TIP # 2 - Keep raw foods and ready-to-eat foods separate.

Cleaning your hands and surfaces thoroughly is just the beginning - raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs can still spread illness causing bacteria to ready-to-eat foods - unless you keep them separate. When juices from raw meats or bacteria from unclean objects accidentally touch cooked or ready-to-eat foods like salads, bread or cooked vegetables, cross contamination can occur.

- When shopping keep raw meats away from other foods in your shopping cart and in your grocery bags.
- Use separate tools and utensils - Never use the same utensils, cutting boards or containers for ready-to-eat foods that were previously used for handling raw meat, poultry or fish.
- Use two cutting boards during preparation - one for raw meats and another for ready-to-eat foods like breads and vegetables. DON'T confuse them. Scarred and cracked cutting boards should be discarded.
- In your refrigerator be sure to store all raw meat products, poultry and fish on the bottom shelf.

TIP # 3 - Keep hot food "hot" and cold food "cold". Use a properly calibrated food thermometer to be sure.

Cooking foods to a proper minimum internal temperature kills harmful pathogens. Many people think they can tell when food is "done" simply by checking its color and texture, but there's no way to be sure it's safe without following a few simple steps. Don't rely on sight or taste alone, a food thermometer is the *only* reliable way to determine the doneness of cooked foods, from pork and chicken to egg dishes, stuffing, microwave meals and leftovers.

- Use a food thermometer to be sure you are cooking foods to the proper temperature.
- Always check the food temperature in the "thickest" part of the food (like a roast or turkey) and/or check in two or three different spots (like a rice dish or casserole).
- Once food is done keep "hot" foods at 140° F or above until time to serve. Cold items should likewise be kept at 40° F or below until time to serve.

TIP # 4 - Refrigerate leftovers QUICKLY after serving to prevent bacteria growth & potential food poisoning.

Perishable foods cannot be left out for longer than **two hours** (or one hour if the temperature is above 90°F). Use a food thermometer to be sure you are cooking foods to the proper temperature. When shopping, the two-hour window includes the amount of time food is in the grocery basket, car and on the kitchen counter.

- Always check the food temperature in the "thickest" part of the food (like a roast or turkey) and/or check in two or three different spots (like a rice dish or casserole).
- Be sure your refrigerator is set to 40° F or below and the freezer is at 0° F.
- NEVER marinate or thaw foods on the counter at room temperature. These should be done in the refrigerator or in some other safe manner.