



WILL COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT & COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER

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REMEMBER FOOD SAFETY DURING HOLIDAY MEAL PLANNING

JOLIET -- Family dinners take on special significance during the holiday season.

The Will County Health Department reminds area residents that simple precautions can help to ensure that foodborne illnesses don't ruin your holiday feasts. The following food safety tips should help to ensure that your holiday meals are a smashing success.

First, remember that successful meal planning takes time. Begin planning for your special meal days in advance, especially if you must thaw large quantities of frozen food.

The safest way to thaw frozen food is in a refrigerator set at 41 degrees or below. Never thaw frozen foods at room temperature. Thawing food in a sink or on a counter top provides an environment suitable for bacterial growth, and enhances the potential for foodborne illnesses.

Thawing frozen turkeys requires extra time. Allow approximately 24 hours of thawing time for each five pounds of meat. Therefore, a 20-pound turkey will require approximately four days to completely thaw in a refrigerator set at 41 degrees or lower.

After thawing, the turkey may be cleaned, trimmed, cooked and stuffed. Always cook the stuffing separately from the turkey.

Stuffing placed inside the turkey prior to cooking may not reach 165 degrees. Adequate cooking temperatures must be maintained in order to minimize the potential for bacterial growth. Poultry and stuffed foods should be cooked so that they reach an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees.

Pork, ground meats, and ground fish should always be cooked to at least 155 degrees. Other meats and fish should be cooked at 145 degrees.

Always use a metal stem thermometer to ensure that proper cooking temperatures are maintained. You can purchase metal stem thermometers at any grocery store.



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

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Remember that frequent hand washing is an absolute must before, during and after any food preparation. Hands should be washed for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water. Washing your hands is especially critical after touching raw meat or poultry. Use separate utensils for each food you prepare to avoid cross-contamination.

Dirty hands, utensils and other soiled equipment can easily transfer potentially dangerous bacteria from one food to another during preparation. You can minimize the potential for food cross-contamination through frequent hand washing, and by cleaning counters, cutting boards and other surfaces as frequently as you can.

Once the holiday meals have been eaten, refrigerate leftovers as quickly as possible. Store leftovers in shallow containers and refrigerate them as quickly as you can. Avoid leaving leftovers out at room temperature.

Foodborne illnesses killed nearly 8,000 Americans during 2009 and result in many thousands of annual hospitalizations. By following a few simple precautions, you can help to ensure that your festive holiday meals are safe to eat.