

## Follow food safety tips to enjoy safe, healthy holiday gatherings

Feasting with family and friends during the holidays is an age-old tradition that lifts the spirits. By observing the following food safety strategies, you can help keep holiday occasions free of food borne illness.

**Clean:** Wash hands and food-contact (cutting boards) surfaces often. Bacteria can spread throughout the kitchen and onto cutting boards, knives, sponges and counter tops. Use only clean kitchen cloths and towels, and wash them promptly after wiping up meat juices. Scrub fruits and vegetables under running water.

**Separate:** Don't cross-contaminate. Don't let bacteria spread from one food, especially raw meat, poultry and seafood, to another. Keep meats and their juices away from ready-to-eat foods, and don't store them above vegetables in the refrigerator in case they drip fluid. Use separate cutting boards for meats and vegetables.

**Cook:** Foods are properly cooked when they are heated long enough and at a high enough temperature to kill the harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness. Use a food thermometer to make sure meat is thoroughly cooked to these temperatures:

- Whole chicken or turkey – 165 degrees Fahrenheit
- Stuffing and casseroles – 165 degrees Fahrenheit
- Ground meat dishes – 160 degrees Fahrenheit (165 degrees for ground poultry)
- Steaks, roasts and chops – 145 degrees Fahrenheit

**Chill:** Refrigerate leftovers promptly. Don't leave food on the counter to cool down. Refrigerating foods quickly keeps most harmful bacteria from growing and multiplying. The refrigerator should be set at 40 degrees Fahrenheit and the freezer at 0 degrees Fahrenheit. The settings' accuracy should be checked occasionally with a thermometer.

### Thawing and cooking a turkey

A fresh turkey – or any fresh poultry – should be cooked within two days of purchase. If you're thawing a frozen turkey, here is how to do it safely:

- *In the refrigerator:* Allow 24 hours of thawing for each four to five pounds of turkey – about three days for a 12-pound turkey or five days for a 20-pound turkey.
- *In a bowl or sink filled with cold water:* Keep the turkey in its original wrapping and allow 30 minutes per pound. Change water frequently.
- *In the microwave:* Check the manual for thawing directions. After thawing, cook immediately.

For optimal safety and uniform doneness, cook stuffing separately. If you do stuff a turkey, use a food thermometer to make sure the center of the stuffing reaches the safe, minimum, internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit. To ensure the turkey also reaches a minimum 165 degrees, insert a meat thermometer in the deepest parts of the flesh. Let the turkey stand for 20 minutes before removing the stuffing.

Refrigerated turkey leftovers should be used within three or four days. See <http://tinyurl.com/m34abl> for more information.

More food safety information:

- Washington State Department of Health, [www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/FoodSafety/Holidays.aspx](http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/FoodSafety/Holidays.aspx)
- Partnership for Food Safety Education, [www.fightbac.org/](http://www.fightbac.org/)
- Foodsafety.gov, [www.foodsafety.gov/index.html](http://www.foodsafety.gov/index.html)