

## Keeping Your Holiday Meals Free of Foodborne Illness

### Introduction:

It's time to relish the flavors of your favorite holiday meal; but, before you serve it to family and friends, are you sure it's safe to eat?

According to new statistics released by the federal government, 76 million Americans get sick each year from food poisoning. Mishandling of food at home contributes to this number. So as you take out the china and gather your loved ones for that special celebration, make sure to follow these four easy tips:

1. Wash hands often,
2. Keep raw meats and ready-to-eat foods separate,
3. Cook to proper temperatures, and
4. Refrigerate promptly below 40 °F.

### Objectives:

Participants will learn:

- How to properly thaw a frozen turkey.
- How to properly cook a turkey.
- How to keep food safe while traveling to holiday gatherings.
- Precautions to take when handling both raw eggs and foods in which eggs are an ingredient.

### Icebreaker:

Have participants discuss their favorite holiday recipes and ask them what they do to keep their food free of foodborne illness during preparation, storage, and transport.

### Let's Talk Turkey

Turkey is a very popular holiday choice; many families prepare it as the main entrée for Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. Turkey is very versatile and can be prepared numerous ways to complete a holiday meal; however, a few food safety tips must be followed when preparing this holiday delight.

### The Big Thaw

Turkeys must be kept at a safe temperature during thawing. While frozen, a turkey is safe indefinitely. However, if the turkey is allowed to thaw at a temperature above 40 °F, any harmful bacteria that may have been present before freezing can begin to grow again unless proper thawing methods are used.

There are three safe ways to thaw a turkey (or any other meat product):

1. In the refrigerator

2. In cold water, and
3. In the microwave oven.

When thawing a turkey in the refrigerator, plan ahead. For every 5 pounds of turkey, allow approximately 24 hours of thawing time in a refrigerator set at 40 °F. Foods thawed in the refrigerator can be safely refrozen without cooking, though there may be some loss of quality.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions when thawing a turkey in the microwave oven. Plan to cook it immediately after thawing because some areas of the turkey may become warm and begin to cook during microwave thawing.

Allow about 30 minutes per pound when thawing a turkey in cold water. Be sure the turkey is in leak-proof packaging. Submerge the turkey in cold water and change the water every 30 minutes until the turkey is thawed. Turkeys thawed by cold water should be cooked immediately because conditions were not temperature controlled.

### **Safe Cooking**

Once your turkey is thawed, it is ready for cooking. Again, it is important to follow a few simple steps to make sure the turkey is cooked to the proper temperature to avoid contamination.

To begin, set the oven temperature to at least 325 °F. Next, place the turkey on a rack in a roasting pan. For safety and uniform doneness of the turkey, cook stuffing separately in a casserole dish. Use a food thermometer to check that the internal temperature of the stuffing has reached 165 °F. If you choose to stuff a turkey, you must use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the turkey and the stuffing. The temperature of a whole turkey must reach 180 °F in the innermost part of the thigh and the center of the stuffing must reach 165 °F. If the turkey has a "pop-up" temperature indicator, it is also recommended that a food thermometer be used to test in several places. When cooking only a turkey breast, the internal temperature should reach 170 °F.

Many factors can affect the roasting time of a whole turkey:

- A frozen or partially frozen turkey takes longer to cook than a completely thawed turkey.
- A turkey will cook faster in a dark roasting pan.
- The depth and size of the pan can affect heat circulation to all areas of the turkey.
- The use of a foil tent for the entire cooking time can slow cooking.
- Placing a lid on the roasting pan speeds up cooking.
- An oven-cooking bag will shorten cooking time.
- A stuffed turkey will take longer to cook than an unstuffed turkey.
- Ovens may heat unevenly.
- The oven rack position can have an effect on even cooking and heat circulation.

### **Traveling to Holiday Gatherings**

It's a time-honored tradition for many people to bring food to holiday gatherings. When deciding what to take, consider the type of food and the distance to travel. Be sure to remember the two-hour rule: Avoid leaving perishable foods at room temperature longer than two hours (one hour

in the warmer seasons when the temperature is over 90 °F). The two hours includes preparation time for foods that aren't cooked or foods that need more preparation steps after cooking.

People traveling a long distance might bring non-perishables such as rolls, breads and cookies. Those traveling about a half hour or less can more safely bring perishable foods such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs and dairy products or foods containing these items. Nearer relatives are a better choice for providing salads, relishes and vegetables.

When traveling with food, keep HOT food hot (140 °F or higher) by wrapping them in foil, and then in heavy towels. Or, carry them in insulated wrappers or containers designed to keep food hot. Keep COLD food cold in a cooler with ice, freezer packs or an insulated container with a cold pack so it remains at 40 °F or lower, especially if traveling over a half hour.

On arrival, place cold foods in the refrigerator. Place hot foods in an oven hot enough to keep the food at an internal temperature of 140 °F or above; use a food thermometer to assure the food stays at a safe internal temperature. Plan to serve foods shortly after guests have arrived.

### **Cooking with Eggs**

Several dishes prepared during the holiday season contain eggs, especially one holiday favorite, eggnog. Eggs are perishable food and must be properly stored and cooked to avoid foodborne illness.

Follow these precautions when handling both raw eggs and foods in which eggs are an ingredient, such as quiche or baked custard:

- Avoid eating raw eggs and foods containing raw eggs such as homemade caesar salad, hollandaise sauce, and mayonnaise. Homemade ice cream and eggnog should also be avoided unless made with a cooked, custard-type base. Commercial forms of these products are safe to serve because they are made with pasteurized liquid eggs. Commercial pasteurization destroys Salmonella bacteria.
- Cook eggs thoroughly until both the yolk and the white are firm. This is especially important for pregnant women, and other high-risk individuals most at risk for foodborne illness. Fried eggs should be cooked on both sides or in a covered pan. Scrambled eggs should be cooked until firm throughout.

### **Handout 1: Thawing and Cooking Foods Safely**

### **Handout 2: Taking Care of Leftovers**

### **Recipe: Classic Cooked Eggnog**

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