



Holiday Menus: Planning for Success

FOOD PROTECTION CONNECTION



Preparing for the holidays starts with planning ahead and remembering a few vital things with regard to food safety

One of my first years as an inspector, I went into a school to do a regulatory inspection the week of Thanksgiving. To my horror, I quickly realized it was going to be a long day. This small school kitchen decided to provide a home-cooked turkey dinner for their students. Two days prior, the staff noticed the turkeys had not thawed completely in the refrigerator, so they decided to leave the turkeys out overnight to fully defrost. The next day, they cooked the turkeys with the goal of cooling them and reheating them the following day for service. Here I stand at 8:00 a.m. on the day they planned to serve them and guess what? The turkeys they pulled from the walk-in cooler, that they cooked yesterday, were still at 50°F – 65°F. My heart sank

because I knew what we had to do: throw away a lot of turkey.

Whether preparing for your own family or for a foodservice facility, all of the same basic safety practices must occur to keep your food safe. Clean, Separate, Cook, Chill. But it all starts with planning ahead and remembering a few vital things with regard to certain types of popular holiday food.

Plan ahead. You must know how many people you'll be serving, have a menu determined, and have your timing worked out. Keep in mind when planning for food deliveries, you need enough space to store all your foods



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TIPS TO KEEP HOLIDAYS HEALTHY

Overwhelmed with lots of questions and food safety concerns to think about? A plethora of information is available on the web about holiday meal cooking. But there are some basics that are essential to remember during those busy holiday times, whether at home or in a foodservice facility.

- Keep yourself and your kitchen clean. Good hygiene and kitchen sanitation are imperative to control foodborne pathogens.
- Keep wiping cloths clean and sanitary or you will spread bacteria throughout the kitchen.
 - > In foodservice facilities, store wiping cloths in properly mixed approved sanitizer.
- Be organized. Disorganized kitchens are hard to keep clean. They lead to cross-contamination and sanitation problems.
- Be sure your kitchen can handle the volume of food you want to prepare, cook, and serve.
 - > Develop your menu ahead of time. Include quantities of food to purchase.

properly. Consider your refrigerator, freezer, and oven space. Many times we forget that our refrigeration units and freezers are only so big. Don't overfill your units. If your facility typically makes ready-to-eat foods and now you want to provide a home-cooked meal for your clients, how are you going to cook all this food? Can you do it all in one day or do you need to pre-cook some of your food items?

You may have limited oven space or stove top burners. Where will you thaw your frozen foods? Are you going to keep leftovers? If so, how will you properly cool them? Do you have enough space? Even large foodservice facilities make mistakes like this in all the excitement of deciding to prepare a holiday meal. Where will they put all that food to keep it hot before serving? If you cook 50 turkeys, you need to have room to hot hold 25 turkeys while the other 25 are cooking. No matter how big or small your kitchen, or the volume of food you are preparing, preplanning is the key to success!

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TIPS

- > Determine which foods will be stored in the refrigerator, freezer, or on storage shelves.
- > Ask yourself: Can this kitchen and equipment handle this amount of food?
- > Ask yourself: Can we cook all this food at one time? Do we need to cook in stages? Is there enough oven space to cook and hot hold food? Do we have enough hot holding units to hold the food before serving?
- Wash your hands properly and frequently. Hand washing is one of the easiest ways to prevent contamination of food. Be mindful of where your hands have been. If there is any chance they became contaminated, stop and wash them thoroughly.
- Be sure everyone handling food is healthy and not exhibiting symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.
- Properly thaw food. Whether you are serving turkey, beef or pork, frozen meat must be thawed correctly.
 - > Never thaw any food on the counter.
 - > Keep turkey and similar meats in their original wrapping when thawing. This protects the food from incidental contamination.
 - > Ideally, thaw meat in the refrigerator for several days. Usually 24 hours is needed for every 5 pounds of meat.



TO KEEP HOLIDAYS HEALTHY

- > You can thaw food in cold (~70°F) running water. Keep it in the original sealed packaging and place in a clean and sanitized sink or pan. Cook the food immediately after it is thawed.
- Cook food to the proper temperature. Always use a food thermometer. There is no other way to accurately assess if the turkey, meat, stuffing, and side dishes have all been fully cooked without one. Too often we tend to rely on the appearance of the food to determine doneness. This is simply inaccurate and unreliable. Most holiday foods need to be cooked to 165°F. Whatever your holiday meat of choice, it must be fully cooked. Visit www.usda.gov or www.foodprotect.org to review cooking temperatures for meats and other items.
 - > Never rely on pop-up timers.
- If you plan to stuff your bird, the USDA recommends preparing the stuffing immediately before putting it in the bird. If you want to make stuffing ahead of time, cook it to 165°F first, cool, and refrigerate. Stuff the bird just before placing it in the oven.
- Precook stuffing made with raw meat, poultry, or shellfish before placing in the cavity of the bird.
- Stuff poultry right before cooking. Do not overstuff. Keep it loosely packed.

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RESOURCES FOR CDM, CFPPs

Healthcare Toolkits

Promote wellness and retail sales! Download our digital toolkits which include promotional posters, healthy seafood recipes, Today's Catch (now serving) cards, table tents, wellness handouts, and sample social media posts.

American Heart Month (February)

National Nutrition Month (March)

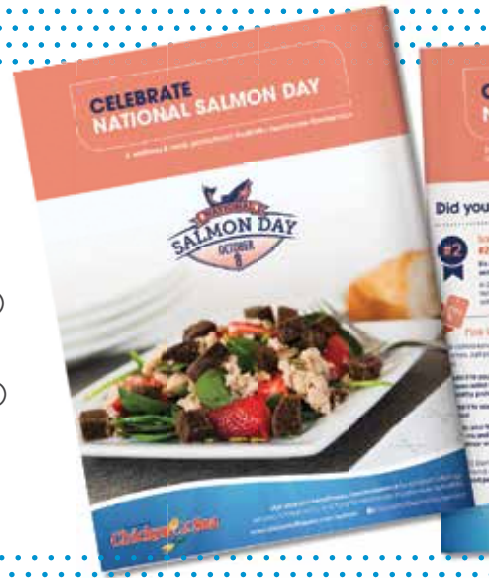
World Oceans Day (June 8th)

National Sandwich Month (August)

Healthy Aging Month (September)

National Salmon Day (October 8th)

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TIPS

- Be sure both the stuffing and meat are at 165°F before removing from cooking.
- If you purchase a pre-stuffed turkey, make sure it is frozen and bears the USDA or state seal of inspection. Keep the turkey frozen until you are ready to cook it. Do not thaw frozen pre-stuffed birds. They should go into the oven frozen and be cooked to 165°F or above. This requires additional time in the oven.
- Wash all produce. Fresh fruits and vegetables should be washed before cutting, chopping, or processing.
- Prevent cross-contamination. Deal with all of your raw animal foods in a separate space or at a different time from your ready-to-eat foods. Thoroughly clean and sanitize between raw and ready-to-eat foods.
- Follow the two-hour rule. Foods should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours. Keep track of how long foods have been sitting out. Get it reheated or cooled immediately.
- Don't forget side dishes. Casseroles, cooked vegetables, potatoes, gravy, and similar all need to be kept out of the danger zone. This is especially an issue while foods are being hot held prior to service.
- When serving food buffet style, provide utensils for all dishes. Supply spoons, ladles, and tongs to prevent your guests from using their fingers to pick up food from the buffet.



TO KEEP HOLIDAYS HEALTHY

- Cool leftovers properly (135°F to 70°F in two hours and 135°F to 41°F in six hours). The first two hours are critical.
- Reheat any leftovers to 165°F if they will be hot held for service the next day.
- Remember desserts. Many desserts contain raw egg or lightly-cooked egg and are not shelf stable. Others contain cream, milk, cheese, and other potentially hazardous foods.
 - > Homemade cream pies, cakes with whipped cream, cream cheese frostings, cheesecake, pumpkin pies, and similar all must be kept refrigerated at 41°F or below.
 - > Many store-bought desserts have preservatives and are shelf stable. Always follow the package recommendations for pre-purchased desserts.
 - > Do not make homemade ice cream with raw unpasteurized eggs unless the recipe calls for a cook step of the cream/egg mixture.
- Use only pasteurized apple cider and juices.
- Do not use or make eggnog with unpasteurized eggs. Many recipes are available for cooking eggnog or using pasteurized egg products.

HAVE SAFE AND HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Holidays are exciting, yet often stressful. Meal planning can be challenging, but planning ahead will help alleviate anxiety as the celebration approaches. Do you have what it takes to make a safe holiday meal in your facility? Make a list of things you need to do on the days leading up to the meal. Include in that list food safety controls such as temperatures, times, storage space, hot holding space, cold holding space, and other food safety notes that you may forget in the hustle and bustle of the day.



HOLIDAYS ARE EXCITING, yet often stressful. Planning ahead for special meals will help alleviate anxiety as the celebration approaches.

Have a happy and memorable holiday meal, not one that will be remembered for the wrong reasons. **E**

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This Level I article assumes that the reader has entry level knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to ensure a foundation of basic concepts of the subject matter.

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1. Poultry should be cooked to what minimum temperature?
A. 150°F
B. 165°F
C. 140°F
2. What should be the reheat temperature of leftovers for next day hot holding?
A. 145°F
B. 155°F
C. 165°F
3. When planning your meal be sure to consider
A. If the students will like the food
B. If you have enough cold storage space to handle the volume of food
C. If you can make food quickly
4. What is the maximum amount of time you should allow perishable food to sit out at room temperature?
A. 1 hour
B. 2 hours
C. 4 hours
5. You should wash your hands thoroughly after
A. Handling raw shell eggs
B. Handling any raw meat
C. Both of the above
6. Fresh produce should always be
A. Washed before use
B. Stored in the refrigerator
C. Purchased locally
7. If you make homemade ice cream
A. Always have a cook step
B. Always use pasteurized eggs
C. Either A or B

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