



Food Safety Practices

Should Never Take A Holiday

by *Melissa Vaccaro, MS, CHO*

Over the holiday season thousands of people will become ill with a foodborne illness due to holiday meal debacles. There doesn't appear to be any specific statistic associated with how many foodborne illnesses occur during the holiday season, but it never seems to fail that two to three days after the festivities, people are calling their doctors and/or regulators to report illness from food. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does keep statistics on foodborne illness, but not specific

enough through an Internet search to find statistics specific to holidays. The CDC does report, however, that one in six Americans—or 48,000 people—will become ill with foodborne illness annually; 28,000 will be hospitalized and 3,000 will die.

Between Thanksgiving and New Year's, most people experience family gatherings, office parties, special menus, potluck dinners, holiday buffets, cookie exchanges, church suppers, mail order deliveries of food, and/or home-



HOW TO AVOID FOODBORNE ILLNESS OVER THE HOLIDAY SEASON

prepared food gifts. So how do we avoid foodborne illness over the busy holiday season?

In many years of inspecting I've observed several areas of concern that lead to the largest problems during the holiday cooking season:

- Failure to control large batches of food
- Improper cleaning and cross-contamination
- Illness—Tis the season

- Improper thawing
- Undercooking
- Other time/temperature abuse

Because holidays present a number of exceptional food safety challenges, appropriate precautions should be taken when handling, preparing, and cooking foods. *You can't cut corners!* To ensure that your holiday foods are not only delicious but safe, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) provides several tips to reduce the risk of the most common foodborne illnesses.

Clean: Wash hands and food-contact surfaces often. Bacteria can spread throughout the kitchen and get onto cutting boards, knives, sponges, and countertops.

THE CDC REPORTS that one in six Americans (48,000 people) will become ill with foodborne illness annually; 28,000 will be hospitalized and 3,000 will die.

Large batches of food can be difficult to control in a kitchen that was not designed for large batch cooking. Be cautious of where your raw food products are in your kitchen, and clean and sanitize when needed. You can never clean enough!

Separate: Don't cross-contaminate. Bacteria can spread from one food product to another. This is especially true for raw meat, poultry, and seafood. Keep these foods and their juices away from ready-to-eat foods. Be careful with wiping cloths. Have separate cloths for raw and ready-to-eat areas of the kitchen. Don't forget, your hands can also be a source of cross-contamination. Clean your hands often.

Thaw: Plan ahead! Thawing takes time. Use one of the following approved thawing methods.

- In the refrigerator a few days in advance
- Under cool running water

Continued on page 12

- Directly into the oven and full cooking (this will take longer)
- In the microwave immediately followed by cooking

Cook: Don't undercook! Cook to proper temperatures. Foods are properly cooked when they are heated for a long enough time and at a high enough temperature to kill the harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness. Have a working, calibrated thermometer to check internal temperatures. Do not 'eyeball' it. If your food is not cooked to its full temperature when it's 'serving time,' you must delay serving until the safe cooking temperature is reached. If you think it is 'close enough' you are taking your chances. Your customers or family will be much happier eating a bit later than to be sick a few days later.

OTHER TEMPERATURE ABUSE: KEEP IT HOT OR COLD

Chill: Refrigerate promptly. Refrigerate foods quickly because cold temperatures keep most harmful bacteria from growing and multiplying. Refrigerators should be set at 40°F or below and the freezer at 0°F. The accuracy of the settings should be checked periodically with a thermometer. Foods must be cooled quickly. Use the two-hour rule. If TCS (time/temperature control for safety) food is in the danger zone (41°F - 135°F) for more

than two hours, you must either get it hot again (above 165°F) or cool it to 41°F or below quickly. TCS foods left in the danger zone for more than four hours should be discarded.

Hold Hot: If you plan to serve food hot, keep it at 135°F or above until service. As with cold foods, use the two-hour rule.

Cool quickly: If you are making foods the day before, make sure to cool them quickly. The faster the better. The cooling rule is:

135°F → 70°F in 2 hours AND 135°F → 41°F in 6 hours

For example: If you manage to cool your food from 135°F - 70°F in one hour, then you have five hours to cool the food the remainder of the way to 41°F. It is critical to move through the first two hours quickly. From 135°F - 70°F is the "party time" for bacteria to grow.

Control Measures

What measures can be used to control some of the most common holiday food failures?

Failure to control large batches of food. Plan ahead. Make sure you have enough space in the kitchen, refrigerators, and freezers for what you want to make.

Safe Cooking Temperatures As Measured With a Food Thermometer

Ground Meat & Meat Mixtures



Beef, Pork, Veal, Lamb
155°F for 15 sec.



Turkey, Chicken
165°F



Beef, Pork, Veal & Lamb

Beef, Pork, Veal and
Lamb
145°F for 15 sec.



Poultry



Chicken and
Turkey, whole

Poultry
Parts

Stuffing (cooked
alone/in bird)

Duck and
Goose

All poultry listed: 165°F



Roasts

Fresh (raw)
145°F for 4 min.



Commercially Pre-
cooked (to reheat)
135°F



Work with small batches at a time if necessary. Review your preparation plan in advance.

Improper cleaning and cross-contamination. Clean surfaces often. Deal with raw and ready-to-eat foods at different times in the kitchen. Wash your hands!

Illness. Don't handle food if you are ill with vomiting, diarrhea, temperature, or nausea. Your customers and family will be more than thankful if you stay away.

Improper thawing. Thaw using only one of the four approved methods. Plan ahead!

Undercooking. Cook all foods to the appropriate temperature. Check the final internal temperature with a calibrated thermometer. Even if you are rushed, the food must reach its final cook temperature to be safe.

Other time/temperature abuse. Follow the two-hour rule when food is in the danger zone. If more than four hours, discard the food. Keep it hot (above 135°F) or keep it cold (below 41°F). Cool foods quickly.

HAPPY, HEALTHY HOLIDAYS

Have you ever heard the saying 'better safe than sorry'? It is better to play it safe when it comes to food handling practices. Mistakes can cause serious illness or even death.

The best advice I can give anyone who is making food for their family or customers over the holiday season is this:

- Plan ahead and think through your menu and preparation processes.
- Have a thermometer handy and actually verify proper temperatures.
- Never rush or cut corners.
- Keep yourself and the entire kitchen clean and sanitary. **E**



Melissa Vaccaro, MS, CHO is the Vice President of Consulting for PTI Consulting Group, a division of Paster Training, Inc. Vaccaro is a 24 year alum of the PA Department of Agriculture as a Food Program Specialist, and is an Executive Board member for the Central Atlantic States Association of Food and Drug Officials (CASA). She is co-author of the SURE™ Complete HACCP Food Safety Series.

melissa.vaccaro@pastertraining.com

Source: www.fda.gov



Seafood

Fin Fish
Flesh is opaque and separates easily with fork

Shrimp, Lobster and Crab
Flesh is pearly and opaque

Clams, Oysters and Mussels
Shells open during cooking

Scallops
Milky white or opaque and firm

All seafood listed: 145°F



Eggs & Egg Dishes



Eggs—immediate consumption
145°F



Egg Dishes
165°F



Leftovers & Casseroles



Leftovers and Casseroles



Any Stuffed Item





Review Questions

FOOD PROTECTION CONNECTION

Reading *Food Safety Practices Should Never Take a Holiday* and successfully completing these questions online has been approved for 1 hour of sanitation CE for CDM, CFPPs. CE credit is available ONLINE ONLY. To earn 1 San CE hour, access the online CE quiz in the ANFP Marketplace. Visit www.ANFPonline.org/market, select “Publication,” then select “CE article” at left, then search the title “*Food Safety Practices Should Never Take a Holiday*” and purchase the article.



1. The temperature danger zone is:
A. 40°F - 145°F
B. 135°F - 41°F
C. 140°F - 41°F
2. Food should be held hot at what temperature?
A. 145°F or above
B. 165°F or above
C. 135°F or above
3. The proper cooling method is:
A. 135°F - 70°F in two hours and 135°F - 41°F in six hours
B. 135°F - 70°F in two hours and 70°F - 41°F in two hours
C. 135°F - 41°F in six hours
4. Foods should never be thawed:
A. Under cool running water
B. In the refrigerator
C. In a bucket of water in a cold storeroom
5. To assure that bacteria on raw meats are killed off, meat must be:
A. Cooked to the proper internal temperature as verified by a thermometer
B. Cooked to 165°F
C. Cooked to 135°F
6. You should never be handling food if:
A. You are ill
B. You are taking medication
C. You have an aching back
7. When planning to make a large holiday meal, it is critical to:
A. Make sure you have enough seats at the table
B. Plan ahead and think through your preparation processes
C. Make everyone's favorite food

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