

The holiday season is a time for celebrating with friends and family. Don't let your holiday be a time to remember because of a foodborne illness. To keep your holiday safe follow these four simple steps.

**Clean, wash hands and surfaces often.** Bacteria can spread throughout the kitchen and get onto cutting boards, utensils, sponges and counter tops. You should:

- Wash your hands with hot soapy water before handling food and after using the bathroom.
- Use plastic or other non-porous cutting boards. These boards should be run through the dishwasher, or washed in hot soapy water after use.
- Consider using paper towels to clean up the kitchen surfaces. If you use cloth towels, wash them often in the hot cycle of your washing machine.

**Separate: Don't cross-contaminate.** Bacteria can be spread from one food to another. This is especially true when handling raw meat, poultry and seafood. Keep these foods and their juices away from ready to eat foods. Here's how:

- Separate raw meat, poultry and seafood from other foods in your grocery-shopping cart and in your refrigerator.
- If possible, use a different cutting board for raw meat products.
- Always wash hands, cutting board dishes and utensils with hot soapy water after they come in contact with raw meat, poultry and seafood.
- Never place cooked food on a plate, which previously held raw meat, poultry and seafood.

**Cook: Cook to proper temperatures.** Food safety experts agree that 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. Follow these recommendations:

- Use a clean thermometer, which measures the internal temperature of cooked foods to make sure meat, poultry, casseroles and other foods are cooked all the way through.
- Cook roasts and steaks to at least 145 degree F.
- Whole poultry should be cooked at 180 degree F for doneness. Insert the thermometer deep in the thigh – 180 degree or 175 degree F in the thickest part of the breast, just above the rib bones.
- Cook ground beef where bacteria can spread during processing to at least 160 degree F.
- Cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm. Don't use recipes in which eggs remain raw or only partially cooked.
- Fish should be opaque and flake easily with a fork.
- When cooking in a microwave oven, make sure there are no cold spots in food where bacteria can survive. For best results, cover food, stir and rotate for even cooking. If there is no turntable, rotate the dish by hand once or twice during cooking.
- Bring sauces, soups and gravy to a boil when reheating. Heat other leftovers thoroughly to at least 165-degree F.

**Chill: Refrigerate promptly:** One of the greatest pleasures of the holiday season is enjoying the bounty of festive foods! After we have all indulged in that second helping of dressing, sweet potato pie and other holiday foods, don't neglect to put the food away as soon as everyone is through. Keep food safe by:

- Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepare foods and leftovers within two hours or sooner.
- Never defrost food at room temperature. Thaw food in the refrigerator, under cold running water or in the microwave. Marinate foods in the refrigerator.
- Divide large amounts of leftovers into small, shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator.
- Don't pack the refrigerator. Cool air must circulate to keep food safe.