

November 15, 2021

DON'T INVITE FOODBORNE ILLNESSES TO THE HOLIDAY TABLE



Share holiday meals with relatives, friends and neighbors, but don't invite foodborne illnesses to the table. That's why your West Central Florida County Health Departments serving Citrus, Hardee, Hernando, Highlands, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk and Sarasota counties want to ensure your holiday feast is one to remember for all the right reasons.



Foodborne illnesses can cause severe symptoms and lead to hospitalizations or, in extreme cases, even prove fatal. Each year, about 3,000 Americans die due to improperly prepared or stored food. Symptoms may happen within minutes and may include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or fever.

Babies, children, pregnant women, older adults and people with compromised immune systems are at greater risk for

these illnesses, but anyone who eats improperly handled food is potentially vulnerable.

The Florida Department of Health urges everyone to practice food safety as part of its public health mission, and the message is timely now as planning for holiday meals in November and December takes place. Microorganisms can cause diseases that ruin holiday gatherings; safe cooking and storage practices can prevent them.

Use these tips to keep your holidays happy and healthy for all:

- Wash hands, utensils and surfaces frequently, especially after handling raw foods.
- Don't thaw the holiday bird on the counter. Use the refrigerator or under cold running water to ensure that the turkey is completely thawed before cooking.
- Establish separate handling areas in the kitchen for cooked and raw foods to ensure they don't come into contact, which would allow for cross contamination.
- Cook foods to proper internal temperatures. A food thermometer is a smart investment and an essential piece of kitchen equipment.

- The dirty dishes can wait, but the leftovers can't. Refrigerate or freeze all perishables within two hours, even if you want to allow people to continue snacking.

Call the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-888-MPHotline (888-674-6854) for more information about safe practices. USDA has more information on foodborne illnesses on its website here, <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2017/11/08/have-food-safe-holiday-season>.

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