

## Holiday Food Safety

A large, traditional meal is at the center of many holiday traditions. Safe and proper food handling practices in the home are critical during this busy time in protecting our families and friends from possible food borne illnesses. Food borne illnesses can be especially serious for pregnant women, babies and the elderly, who may have fragile immune systems.

One top safety concern, this time of year, is cross contamination. When preparing your meal, thoroughly wash hands, cutting boards and utensils before and after contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs. Keep raw meat, poultry, and seafood apart from foods that won't be cooked such as salads, etc.

Here are some other tips to follow for a safe holiday season:

- Thaw the turkey in the refrigerator at 45 degrees, not on the counter. Thawing at room temperature promotes bacteria growth. Be sure to allow 24 hours of defrosting for each five pounds of turkey.
- The safest way to cook the stuffing is separate from the turkey. Stuffing placed in an uncooked turkey is susceptible to bacteria growth. However, if you choose to cook the stuffing in the turkey, stuff it loosely to ensure safe, even cooking, and be sure the stuffing in the turkey reaches an internal temperature of 165 degrees.
- Be sure to thoroughly cook the turkey at 325 degrees. Cooking a turkey at less than 325 degrees is unsafe because it allows the turkey and stuffing to remain in the danger zone for bacterial growth for too long. A whole turkey should reach an internal temperature of 180 degrees. Use a meat thermometer to check the temperature, even if the turkey has a "pop up" temperature indicator.
- Be careful with holiday buffets. Servings should be kept small and replenished often, directly from the stove or refrigerator. The longer food is kept out, especially beyond two hours, the higher the risk of food poisoning. Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot.
- Carefully store leftovers. Slice the turkey before refrigerating; whole turkeys do not store safely in the refrigerator. Store the turkey and stuffing in separate, shallow, covered containers and refrigerate at 45 degrees or below within two hours of cooking. Perishable foods left at room temperature for longer than two hours are susceptible to bacterial growth. Use leftover turkey and stuffing within four days, gravy within two days.

For more food safety information during the holiday season, please stop by the WSU Colville Reservation – Ferry County Extension office and ask for our free publications, or contact Judy Moses, Family & Consumer Sciences Coordinator, 634-2304 or [jmbmoses@wsu.edu](mailto:jmbmoses@wsu.edu).