Greene County Public Health
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Press Release

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Food Safety Tips for Healthy Holidays

Following safe food-handling practices will help prevent food poisoning, also called foodborne illness

XENIA, OH -- Parties, family dinners, and other gatherings where food is served are all part of the holiday cheer. But the joy can change to misery if food makes you or others ill.

Typical symptoms of foodborne illness, also known as food poisoning, include vomiting, diarrhea, and flu-like symptoms, which can occur anywhere from a few hours to several days after consuming contaminated food or drinks.

The symptoms are usually not long-lasting in healthy people — typically lasting a few hours or a few days — and usually resolve without medical treatment. But foodborne illness can be severe and even life-threatening to anyone, especially those most at risk:

- older adults
- infants and young children
- pregnant women
- people with diabetes, HIV/AIDS, cancer, or any condition that weakens their immune system
- people who take medicines that suppress the immune system; for example, some medicines for lupus, psoriasis, and rheumatoid arthritis

Combating bacteria, viruses, parasites, and other contaminants in our food supply is a high priority for Greene County Public Health. You play an important role in ensuring safe food-handling practices at home. The good news is that practicing four basic food safety measures can help prevent foodborne illness.

1. CLEAN

The first rule of safe food preparation in the home is to keep everything clean.

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling any food. To help you remember, it takes about 20 seconds to sing "Happy Birthday" two times.

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- Wash food-contact surfaces (such as cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and countertops) with hot, soapy water after preparing each food item and before moving on to the next item.
- Rinse fruits and vegetables thoroughly under cool, running water, and use a produce brush to remove any surface dirt.
- Do not rinse raw meat and poultry before cooking. Washing these foods makes it more likely for bacteria to spread to areas around the sink and countertops.

2. SEPARATE

Don't give bacteria the opportunity to spread from one food to another (cross-contamination).

- Keep raw eggs, meat, poultry, seafood, and their juices away from foods that won't be cooked. Take this precaution when shopping in the store, storing food in the refrigerator at home, and preparing meals.
- Consider using one cutting board exclusively for foods that will be cooked (such as raw meat, poultry, and seafood), and another for foods that will not be cooked (such as raw fruits and vegetables).
- Keep fruits and vegetables that will be eaten raw separate from other foods, such as raw meat, poultry, or seafood, and from kitchen utensils used for those products.
- Do not put cooked meat or other food that is ready to eat on an unwashed plate that has held any raw eggs, meat, poultry, seafood, or their juices.

3. COOK

Food is safely cooked when it reaches a high enough internal temperature to kill harmful bacteria.

- ***Color is not a reliable indicator of doneness***. Use a food thermometer to make sure meat, poultry, and fish are cooked to a safe internal temperature. To check a turkey for safety, insert a food thermometer into the innermost part of the thigh and wing, as well as the thickest part of the breast. The turkey is safe when the temperature reaches 165°F. If the turkey is stuffed, the temperature of the stuffing should be 165°F. (Please read on for more pointers on stuffing.)
- Bring sauces, soups, and gravies to a rolling boil when reheating.
- Cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm. When making your own eggnog or other recipes that call for raw eggs, use pasteurized shell eggs, liquid or frozen pasteurized egg products, or powdered egg whites.
- Don't eat uncooked cookie dough, which may contain raw eggs and raw flour.

4. CHILL

Refrigerate foods quickly because harmful bacteria grow rapidly at room temperature.

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- Refrigerate leftovers and takeout foods — and *any* type of food that should be refrigerated — within two hours. That includes pumpkin pie!
- Set your refrigerator at or below 40°F and your freezer at 0°F. Check both periodically with an appliance thermometer.
- ***Never defrost food at room temperature.*** Food can be defrosted safely in the refrigerator, under cold running water, or in the microwave. Food thawed in cold water or in the microwave should be cooked immediately.
- Allow sufficient time for the food to thaw properly. For example, a 20-pound turkey needs four to five days to thaw completely when thawed in the refrigerator.
- Don't taste food that looks or smells questionable. A good rule to follow is to "throw it out when in doubt".
- Leftovers should be used within three to four days.

BONUS TIP: USE CARE WITH STUFFING!

- Whether it is cooked inside or outside the bird, all stuffing and dressing must be cooked to a minimum temperature of 165°F. For best safety, cook your stuffing in a casserole dish.
- Prepare the stuffing and stuff it into the turkey immediately before placing it in the oven.
- Mix the wet and dry ingredients for the stuffing separately, then combine them just before use.
- The turkey should be stuffed loosely, about 3/4 cup stuffing per pound of turkey.
- Any extra stuffing should be baked in a greased casserole dish.

For More Information:

- The FDA Food Information Line: 1-888-SAFEFOOD (1-888-723-3366)
- The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline: 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) or mphotline@usda.gov
- The FDA General Information Line: 1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332)

For more information, please contact our Environmental Health Services team at Greene County Public Health at 937-374-5607.

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