Don’t Let Foodborne Illness Be A Guest at Your Holiday Table

A large crowd to cook for, a big bird to roast, and too many cooks in the kitchen can lead to foodborne illness from holiday dining. But handling and cooking a turkey should not be an illness waiting to happen. Following basic recommendations will help ensure safe food and prevent foodborne illness for diners—not only during the holidays, but year-round.

CLEAN: Wash hands and surfaces often.
• Keep everything clean while preparing holiday meals.
• Wash hands and kitchen surfaces often with hot water and soap.
• Wash cutting boards, dishes, and utensils after preparing each food item and before going on to the next item.
• Paper towels are recommended for cleaning up kitchen surfaces.

SEPARATE: Don’t cross-contaminate.
• Cross-contamination is the scientific word for how bacteria can be spread from one food product to another.
• Special attention needs to be given to cross-contamination when handling raw meats and ready-to-eat foods. Keep raw foods away from ready-to-eat foods.
• Separate raw meat, poultry, and seafood from other foods when shopping at the grocery store and in your refrigerator.
• Use one cutting board for raw meat and poultry and a separate one for other food.
• Never place cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meat and poultry unless the plate has been thoroughly cleaned.

COOK: Cook to proper temperatures.
• Use a food thermometer to make sure meat and poultry are cooked to proper temperatures.
• Cook beef, lamb, veal and pork roasts, chops and steaks to an internal temperature of at least 145 ºF, and allow meat to rest 3 minutes before carving or serving. Cook whole poultry to 165 ºF and ground beef to 160 ºF.
• When reheating, leftovers should be thoroughly heated to 165 ºF; sauces, soup, and gravy should be brought to a rolling boil.

CHILL: Refrigerate promptly.
• Refrigerate or freeze leftovers within 2 hours
• Place leftovers into shallow containers for rapid cooling.
• The refrigerator should be maintained at 40 ºF or below and the freezer at 0 ºF or below. (Use an appliance thermometer to check the temperature.)
• Keep hot foods hot, 140 ºF or above, and cold foods cold, 40 ºF or below.
• Never defrost food at room temperature.
• Thaw food in the refrigerator, in a cold water bath, or in the microwave.
• Marinate foods in the refrigerator.