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News Release

For Immediate Release

Prepare Food Carefully to Prevent Illness

Foodborne illness strikes nearly 76 million people each year, often from food cooked at home. A Thanksgiving dinner that is not properly or safely prepared can make your family or guests ill.

The health department encourages people to think about food safety as early as when they are shopping for Thanksgiving meal ingredients.

"Shop only at inspected and approved stores," says Public Health Investigator Roxanne Sharp. "Don't buy canned products that are dented, bulging, rusty or leaking. This may indicate the food has become contaminated or bacterial growth has begun inside the can. Also, buy only cold items that feel cold and frozen foods that are frozen solid. Add cold and frozen foods to your cart last, and then take them home and refrigerate them as quickly as possible."

Cold foods should be stored in a refrigerator with an internal temperature that stays at 41°F or below, and there should be plenty of room for air to circulate around refrigerated foods.

"One mistake we sometimes see is people not allowing enough time to thaw the turkey," says Sharp. "The safest way to thaw a turkey is in the refrigerator, not on the countertop. It should be thawed on the bottom shelf, with a tray underneath it to catch any drips, to prevent raw juices from contaminating other foods."

Before cooking, people should also wash their hands, and be sure the food preparation area is clean.

"Turkey also needs to be cooked thoroughly to ensure it is safe," adds Sharp. "Turkey should be cooked to an internal temperature of 165°F. The safest way to measure the internal temperature is by inserting a food thermometer deep into the turkey breast. Don't depend on the pop-up thermometers."

People who are traveling should cook turkey completely then cover it tightly with foil. Upon arrival, it should be reheated in a 325°F oven until the turkey reaches an internal temperature of 165°F.

"It is also important to cook stuffing to an internal temperature of 165°F," says Sharp. "Since stuffing and turkey can cook at different speeds, it is safer to cook the stuffing separately in a casserole dish, not inside the turkey."

Families that like to snack on leftovers after the meal should remember that leftovers need to be refrigerated within two hours of being cooked. Turkey meat should be removed from the bone

and placed in shallow containers in the refrigerator to cool quickly and evenly, or placed in the freezer. Stuffing and gravy should be refrigerated in separate dishes. Leftovers should be reheated to at least 165°F and should be eaten within three days.

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