



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Food Safety for the Holiday Season



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BURLINGTON – Millions of people get sick with foodborne illness each year in the United States.

The Vermont Department of Health recommends cooking and handling food safely to prevent foodborne illness this holiday season.

Food is safely cooked when it reaches a high enough internal temperature to kill harmful bacteria that can cause foodborne illness. Refrigerate foods quickly since cold temperatures slow growth of harmful bacteria. Keep hot foods hot at 140°F or above by using chafing dishes or hot plates, and keep cold foods cold at 40°F or below by using ice.

“Keep food temperatures in mind when planning meals, cooking, and bringing food to someone’s house,” says Elisabeth Wirsing, food and lodging program chief at the Health Department. “Follow safety practices throughout the entire meal—from preparing the food to storing leftovers.”

Eat cooked food promptly and refrigerate leftovers within two hours after cooking. Refrigerate or freeze food in shallow storage containers for quicker cooling. Discard any turkey, stuffing, and gravy left out at room temperature longer than two hours.



USDA Recommended Safe Minimum Internal Temperatures



Foodborne illness or “food poisoning” ranges from slight discomfort to serious infections that require hospitalization. Infants and young children, pregnant women, and older adults are at greatest risk for serious complications or death.

The Health Department recommends the following to reduce the risk of foodborne illness:

- Wash hands before and after preparing food.
- Keep raw meat and poultry apart from cooked foods—do not cross-contaminate.
- Wash hands, utensils, and kitchen surfaces with hot soapy water after they touch raw meat or poultry.
- Defrost turkeys in the refrigerator or in cold water. Allow 24 hours per five pounds in the refrigerator; allow 30 minutes per one pound in cold water.
- Buy a fresh turkey (not frozen) one day before cooking.
- The turkey should be cooked immediately after stuffing.
- Cook turkey until a meat thermometer in the thickest part of the meat and/or in the center of food and stuffing cooked with the turkey reads 165°F. (Do not let thermometer touch bones when reading temperature.)

- Refrigerated turkey should be eaten within three to four days; gravy, stuffing and other sides within one to two days; and frozen leftovers within one month.
- Reheat leftovers to 165°F—the food should be hot and steaming.

For a temperature guide and more information on holiday food safety, visit:

http://healthvermont.gov/enviro/food_lodge/holiday_food.aspx

For the complete Health Department Food Safety Guide, visit:

http://healthvermont.gov/enviro/food_lodge/food_safety.aspx

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