

Food Safety for the Holidays

The holidays can present more possibilities for food poisoning than any other time, because larger meals are being prepared, new recipes are being tried, buffets are often set out for guests and large amounts of leftovers may remain for later meals. Below are a few reminders to help ensure a safe holiday feast.

Avoid cross contamination – Keep raw meat, poultry, egg dishes and other foods separate.

Do not thaw foods on the kitchen counter – Never defrost food at room temperature. Thaw food in the refrigerator, in a cold waterbath or in the microwave. Marinate foods in the refrigerator.

Avoid eating foods with raw eggs – Eggs are safe to use in homemade recipes as long as the egg mixtures reach 160°F. Use a food thermometer to ensure the mixture reaches the proper temperature.



Do not second guess the internal temperature of cooked foods – Always use a clean food thermometer to be sure that a safe internal temperature has been reached for meat, poultry and casseroles. Roasts and steaks should cook to at least 140°F., whole poultry to 180°F. in the thigh, ground beef to 160°F. and leftovers to 160°F.

Do not leave perishables out for more than two hours – Follow the two-hour rule when keeping food at room temperature. Keep hot foods hot at 140°F. or higher and cold foods cold at 40°F. or lower. Use chafing dishes, crock pots and warming trays to keep food hot. Keep cold foods cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice.

Avoid perishable mail order foods that arrive warm – Perishable mail order foods should arrive at refrigerator temperatures or frozen. If they arrive feeling warm, do not consume the food. Always check the label on mail order items concerning proper storage.

Do not overpack the refrigerator with leftovers – Store leftovers in shallow containers to permit rapid cooling in the refrigerator. Do not overpack to allow cold air to circulate around the food to keep it safe.

Avoid improper reheating of leftovers – Leftovers should be thoroughly heated to 160°F. Sauces, soups and gravies should be brought to a rolling boil.

Source: Food and Safety Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC