

Spread Holiday Cheer, Not Foodborne Illnesses, This Season

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 11, 2018 – If you're cooking for friends and family this holiday season, it's important to make sure you're not spreading bacteria that can cause harmful foodborne illnesses.

A recent study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and North Carolina State University found that Americans are practicing some disturbing food handling behaviors when it comes to preparing food at home.

The study found that in the control group, 66 percent of participants did not use a thermometer to check the temperature of the ground turkey burgers. Even when participants did use a food thermometer, only 54 percent of turkey burgers reached the safe internal cooking temperature of 165°F.

Participants also spread potentially harmful bacteria from raw meat and poultry onto other surfaces or food items in the kitchen. The study found that participants contaminated 48 percent of the spice containers, 11 percent of refrigerator door handles, 11 percent of water faucet handles and five percent of chef salads during the meal preparation.

These statistics are concerning when you consider that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that millions of Americans are sickened with foodborne illnesses (also known as food poisoning) each year, resulting in roughly 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths. Children, older adults and those with compromised immune systems are especially at risk.

Make sure you're protecting your family by not falling into bad food preparation habits. Always follow the four steps to food safety:

- Clean your hands thoroughly for a full 20 seconds with soapy water. Always serve food on clean plates and avoid reusing plates that previously held raw meat and poultry.
- Separate raw meat, poultry and egg products from ready-to-eat foods.
- Cook, using a food thermometer to make sure food reaches a safe minimum internal temperature:
 - Beef, pork, lamb and veal (steaks, chops and roasts): 145°F with a three minute rest.
 - Ground beef, pork, lamb and veal: 160°F.
 - Poultry (whole or ground): 165°F.
- Chill leftovers within two hours of cooking. Keep track of how long items have been sitting on the buffet table and discard anything that has been out longer than two hours.

If you are transporting food items to a holiday party, keep hot foods hot (140°F or above) and cold foods cold (40°F or below). Use separate, insulated containers for hot and cold foods, and make sure that cold foods are packed with cold sources, such as ice or frozen gel packs. The best way to ensure that food is being held at a safe temperature while you are traveling is to place an appliance thermometer in the cooler.

Whether you're wondering how to cook your holiday ham, or debating whether it's time to throw out those party leftovers, USDA has resources to help. The FoodKeeper app, available for both Android and iOS devices, is a quick and easy resource you can download and use at home to check storage times and preparation tips for more than 500 food items.

If you'd like to speak to an expert, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) or chat live with a food safety specialist in English or Spanish at [AskKaren.gov](https://www.fsis.usda.gov/askkaren) , available from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday. For more information, visit [Foodsafety.gov](https://www.fsis.usda.gov/foodsafety) and follow [@USDAFoodSafety](https://twitter.com/USDAFoodSafety) on Twitter.

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