



News from the Office of
ERIE COUNTY EXECUTIVE MARK POLONCARZ

NEWS RELEASE

Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein

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Put Food Safety First When Preparing Your Holiday Meal

Follow these food safety tips when preparing turkey and handling leftovers

ERIE COUNTY, NY— The Erie County Department of Health (“ECDOH”) reminds us to put safety first when preparing holiday meals. “The holidays are a busy time for most people and thinking about food safety may not be high on the list of concerns. But unsafe cooking and handling of leftovers can make you sick” said **Erie County Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein**. “Frequent hand-washing is the most important safety tip for all of us to remember as we prepare and enjoy holiday feasts with family and friends,” said Burstein. Poultry may contain harmful bacteria such as Salmonella, Listeria, and Campylobacter. Washing chicken and other poultry does not remove bacteria. You can kill these bacteria only by cooking chicken to the proper temperature.

For some of us, roasting a turkey can be a challenge onto itself. When preparing a turkey, be aware of the four main safety issues: thawing, preparing, stuffing, and cooking to adequate temperature.

Safe Thawing

Thawing turkeys must be kept at a safe temperature. The "danger zone" is between 40 and 140°F — the temperature range where foodborne bacteria multiply rapidly. While frozen, a turkey is safe indefinitely, but as soon as it begins to thaw, bacteria that may have been present before freezing can begin to grow again, if it is in the "danger zone." There are three safe ways to thaw food: in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in a microwave oven.

Safe Preparation

Bacteria present on raw poultry can contaminate your hands, utensils, and work surfaces as you prepare the turkey. If these areas are not cleaned thoroughly before working with other foods,

bacteria from the raw poultry can then be transferred to other foods. After working with raw poultry, always wash your hands, utensils, and work surfaces before they touch other foods.

Safe Stuffing

For optimal safety and uniform doneness, cook the stuffing outside the turkey in a casserole dish. However, if you place stuffing inside the turkey, do so just before cooking, and use a food thermometer. Make sure the center of the stuffing reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F. Bacteria can survive in stuffing that has not reached 165°F, possibly resulting in foodborne illness.

Safe Cooking

Set the oven temperature no lower than 325°F and be sure the turkey is completely thawed. Place turkey breast-side up on a flat wire rack in a shallow roasting pan 2 to 2-1/2 inches deep. Check the internal temperature at the center of the stuffing and meaty portion of the breast, thigh, and wing joint using a food thermometer. Cooking times will vary. The food thermometer must reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F. Let the turkey stand 20 minutes before removing all stuffing from the cavity and carving the meat.

Refrigerate leftovers within two hours of preparation.

Leaving food out too long is one of the biggest holiday food safety problems. When food sits out for more than two hours in the danger zone -- above 40 degrees and below 140 degrees -- it is prime for bacterial growth. Store leftovers in 2-inch deep, shallow containers and make sure the refrigerator is not over-packed and there is plenty of air circulating around the food so it can be properly cooled.

Reheat leftovers to 165 degrees.

Filling a plate of food and popping it into the microwave for a few minutes may seem safe enough. But, you really need to use a thermometer to make sure all the food is reheated enough to kill bacteria. Microwaves heat in an uneven manner, so let the covered food sit for a minute or two to let the heat destroy any bugs, then check the temperature all around the plate.

Following these cooking guidelines can help you prepare a safe holiday dinner that everyone will enjoy.

For more information on Holiday Meal and Food safety :

Erie County Department of Health

www.erie.gov/health

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/features/turkeytime/>

Food Safety.Gov

<http://www.foodsafety.gov/blog/buffet.html>

Web MD

<http://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/features/top-10-holiday-food-safety-tips>