



HOLIDAY FOOD SAFETY

The Issue

Food is an important part of many holiday celebrations. You can help reduce the risk of foodborne illness for your family and friends during the holiday season by following some basic food safety tips.

Background

Foodborne illness ("food poisoning") is caused by eating food contaminated with certain bacteria, viruses, or parasites. Among the types of disease-causing organisms are Salmonella, E. coli O157:H7 and Listeria monocytogenes. These bacteria are sometimes found in or on the following:

- raw and undercooked meat, poultry, fish and their juices
- the surfaces of and/or in the juices of raw fruits and vegetables
- unpasteurized (raw) milk and (raw) milk products, such as raw-milk soft and semi-soft cheeses
- raw and lightly cooked eggs

Since these foods are often part of the menu at many holiday meals and parties (e.g., cheese, fruit and vegetable platters, seafood, turkey, tourtière, baked goods, eggnog and cider), it is a good idea to take extra care when preparing, cooking, serving and storing food during the holiday season.

Health Effects

The most common symptoms of food poisoning are stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and fever.

Most people recover completely from foodborne illness, but some groups are at greater risk of serious health effects, including kidney

problems and even death. The groups at greater risk are young children, the elderly, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems, including those undergoing chemotherapy, transplant patients, diabetics, people with HIV, as well as alcoholics and other substance abusers.

Minimizing Your Risks

General Food Safety Tips

There are four basic steps you should always follow to help reduce the risk of foodborne illness:

Clean: Wash hands, contact surfaces (e.g., kitchen counters) and utensils often to avoid the spread of bacteria.

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food, and after using the bathroom, changing diapers or touching pets.

- Always wash fresh fruits and vegetables with clean, running water that is safe to drink.

Separate: Keep raw foods separate from cooked and ready-to-eat foods to avoid cross-contamination.

- Ideally, use two cutting boards, one for raw meat, poultry and seafood, and one for washed fresh produce and ready-to-eat foods.

- Never place cooked food back on the same plate or cutting board that previously held raw food, unless it has been washed with soap and warm water.

Cook: Make sure you kill harmful bacteria by cooking foods to the proper internal temperature.



- Use an instant-read digital thermometer and cook to these temperatures:
- 85°C (185°F) for whole poultry
- 74°C (165°F) for stuffing, casseroles, leftovers, egg dishes, ground turkey and ground chicken, including sausages containing poultry meat
- 71°C (160°F) for pork chops, ribs and roasts, and for ground beef, ground pork and ground veal, including sausages
- at least 63°C (145°F) for all whole muscle beef and veal cuts, such as steaks and roasts
- When you think the food is almost ready, remove it from the heat source and insert the thermometer in the thickest part of the food, away from bone, fat or gristle. Resume cooking if the proper temperature has not been reached.
- Be sure to wash the thermometer in between temperature checks.
- Eat hot foods while they are still hot.

Chill: Keep cold foods cold. Bacteria can grow rapidly when food is allowed to sit in the so-called danger zone between 4°C (40°F) and 60°C (140°F).

- Eat cold foods while they are still cold.
- Remove bones from large pieces of meat or poultry and divide them into smaller portions before storing.
- Refrigerate or freeze leftovers within two hours in covered shallow containers.
- Discard perishable food that has been allowed to sit at room temperature for more than two hours. You cannot tell whether

food is contaminated with surface bacteria by the way it looks, smells or tastes. When in doubt, throw it out!

Additional Food Safety Tips for Holiday Situations

Baked goods: Raw eggs can contain Salmonella bacteria, so you should not eat uncooked cookie dough, batters or frostings made with raw fresh eggs. Remember, young children are at greater risk for foodborne illness, so they should not be allowed to “lick the spoon” if the dough, batter or frosting contains any raw egg ingredients.

Eggnog: Store-bought eggnog is pasteurized and does not require heating to kill harmful bacteria. If you are making eggnog at home, you should:

- use pasteurized egg and milk ingredients, which are available at many grocery stores; or,
- heat the egg-milk mixture to at least 71°C (160°F) and then refrigerate in small amounts using shallow containers so it will cool quickly.

Fruit juices and ciders: If you are making drinks with fresh fruit juices or cider, check the label to see if the product has been pasteurized. If the juice or cider is not pasteurized or if you are uncertain, you can minimize risks by boiling the product to make sure it is safe for everyone.

Oysters and seafood: Some people enjoy certain raw seafood items, such as oysters and sushi. However, raw seafood may carry bacteria, parasites or viruses that can cause food poisoning.

Foods stored in oil: Home-prepared products in oil, such as herbs, garlic or peppers, are popular as gift items during the holiday season.

However, for foods like this to be safe and healthy, they must be prepared and stored properly.

- If home-prepared products in oil are made using fresh ingredients (e.g., fresh herbs, peppers, garlic, etc.), the products should be:
 - refrigerated immediately after being made; and,
 - discarded if stored for more than one week.
- However, if all ingredients added to the oil are dehydrated (e.g., dried herbs and spices), then the product can be stored safely at room temperature.
- If you receive a home-prepared gift like this and are not able to find out when and how it was made and stored, it is safer to discard the product.

For commercially-prepared foods stored in oil, check the label. If the list of ingredients includes salt and/or acids, these products have been preserved and do not pose a risk of food poisoning, as long as you follow directions for storage (e.g., refrigerate after opening and between each use).

Holiday buffets: If you are serving food buffet-style, use warming trays, chafing dishes or crock pots to keep hot foods hot. Keep cold foods cold by putting serving trays on crushed ice. Do not let food remain at room temperature for more than two hours.

Also, do not add new food to serving dishes that are already in use. Instead, use a clean platter or serving dish each time you re-stock the buffet.

Travelling with food: As always, keep hot foods hot (at or above 60°C / 140°F) and cold foods cold (at or below 4°C / 40°F). Transport hot food in insulated containers with hot packs. Transport cold food in a cooler with ice or freezer packs.



The Government of Canada's Role

Health Canada sets policies and standards governing the safety and nutritional quality of all food sold in Canada. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) enforces the policies and standards, and ensures that necessary warnings are released quickly to the Canadian public.

As a founding member of the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education, Health Canada also participates in public awareness campaigns about safe food practices. An example is a program called Fight BAC!®, which encourages Canadian consumers to think of food safety at every step of the food handling process, from shopping for groceries to re-heating leftovers.

Need More Info?

There is detailed information about food safety in the following It's Your Health articles:

Garlic-in-Oil

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/food/garlic.html>

Let's Talk Turkey

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/food/turkey.html>

Salmonella Prevention

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/food/salmonella.html>

Unpasteurized Fruit Juice and Cider

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/food/juice.html>

Also, see the Canadian Food Inspection Agency publication, Food Safety Facts for the Holidays
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/corpaffr/foodfacts/holidaye.shtml>

and the Fight BAC!® Web site
<http://www.canfightbac.org/english/indexe.shtml>

For additional articles, go to the It's Your Health Web site at:
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/index.html>

You can also call (613) 957-2991

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