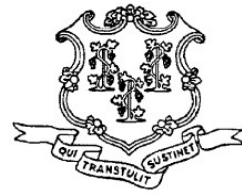


News



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 21, 2011

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It's Turkey Time!: DPH Reminds People of Food Safety This Holiday Season

Hartford – The Department of Public Health (DPH) reminds Connecticut residents that food safety is especially important as they prepare holiday meals. Many holiday dinners include meat and poultry, a possible source of foodborne disease unless handled and prepared properly. This holiday season, DPH urges consumers to follow the basic principles of food safety and good hygiene when buying and preparing food items.

“When we think of the holidays, food safety usually isn’t the first thing that comes to mind,” said Tracey Weeks, DPH Food Protection Program Coordinator. “The holidays are a time when people get together to enjoy each other’s company and share meals. It’s very important that when preparing and storing these meals, people take precautions to make sure their food is safe for consumption. Not taking the steps to prepare food safely could put your loved ones at risk for foodborne illness, ruining the joy of the holidays.”

Holiday buffets, party trays or even a poorly stored turkey can be the culprit of disease. Improperly stored food items provide breeding grounds for bacteria, which cause illness that affects an average of 48 million people across the country each year.

Here are a few food safety tips to help keep you and your loved ones healthy during the holiday season:

Wash hands - Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water and dry your hands with a paper towel following restroom use, before preparing foods, after handling raw meat and before eating. Clean hands will help prevent the spread of potentially illness-causing microorganisms.

Clean - Wash and sanitize food-contact surfaces often. Many home dishwashers now come with a sanitizing cycle option. If not, you can sanitize by immersing utensils, cutting boards, and other items that come in contact with food for at least one minute in a clean solution containing at least 50 parts per million of chlorine (one teaspoon of 5.25 percent household bleach per gallon of water). Bacteria can spread and get onto cutting boards, knives and counter tops. Wash fruits and vegetables with water before preparing.

Thaw properly - Proper methods for thawing a turkey include: thawing in a refrigerator with a temperature of 41° F or less (allow 3-4 days for thawing); placing under cool running water at a temperature of 75 °F or less; or thawing in a microwave and cooking the turkey immediately.

Take temperatures - Cook your turkey at 325° F until its internal temperature reaches at least 165°F. Cooked, hot foods should be kept at 140° F or warmer. Be sure to use a food thermometer to check temperatures. When cooking a stuffed turkey, be sure that the turkey, as well as the stuffing inside of it, reaches at least 165° F. Even if the turkey itself reaches 165° F, the stuffing inside may take longer to reach 165° F, the temperature safe enough to kill any bacteria that may be present.

Stuffing - Prepare your stuffing and turkey just before cooking. Using a cold stuffing may make it more difficult to reach the safe temperature of 165°F. Stuff the turkey loosely and use $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cup of stuffing per pound of turkey. Use a moist stuffing rather than a dry stuffing because heat destroys bacteria better in a moist environment. For a safer approach, cook stuffing separately.

Keep it cold - Cold foods should be kept at 41 °F or less. After the turkey is served, immediately slice and refrigerate on shallow platters. Store leftover food in shallow containers and refrigerate promptly. Use refrigerated turkey and stuffing within three to four days. Use gravy within one to two days. If freezing leftovers, use within two to six months for best quality.

Transport safely - Keep hot foods hot (140° F or above) and cold foods cold (41° F or less).

Reheat - Leftover turkey and stuffing should be stored separately in shallow dishes or platters. Rapidly reheat leftovers to a minimum internal temperature of 165° F.

Don't cross contaminate - Put the turkey directly into the roasting pan as you remove it from the wrapper to avoid contaminating the sink and other surfaces with bacteria that are often present on poultry. Don't touch other foods with hands or utensils that have been used on raw poultry without properly washing your hands first. Washing your hands, wearing disposable gloves, and changing them after handling raw foods is the safest way to prevent cross contamination.

Don't cook if you're ill - Don't prepare foods if you are experiencing symptoms of vomiting or diarrhea or if you recently had such symptoms. Many foodborne illnesses are transmitted unknowingly by a food preparer who had these symptoms – even if they washed their hands! If you are ill, let someone else do the cooking and provide a safe and enjoyable dinner for your family and friends.

For more information and free literature about food safety, contact the Food Protection Program at (860) 509-7297.

The Connecticut Department of Public Health is the state's leader in public health policy and advocacy with a mission to protect and promote the health and safety of the people of our state. To contact the department, please visit its website at www.ct.gov/dph or call (860) 509-7270.

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