



Special Feature

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Holiday safety is on the menu

(COLUMBUS, Neb.) – Food is a big part of how we celebrate the holidays — especially those oh-so-good leftovers! However, we don't want spoiled food to spoil the fun, so remember to add a dash of safety with the foods you whip up.

Doing so can help reduce the risk of foodborne illness — or food poisoning — which is a possibility in any kitchen. The culprit? Harmful bacteria that can find their way into foods. To help reduce this risk:

Keep it clean. This is an important step to help keep bacteria from spreading.

- Remember to wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Wash up before and after handling food and when you switch from one task to another, such as after handling raw poultry and then moving on to cut up raw vegetables.
- Clean kitchen surfaces with hot, soapy water. Use disinfectant, if necessary. Think about buying two cutting boards for your kitchen: one for raw meats and another for raw foods, like vegetables. Always wash cutting boards between uses.
- Don't rinse raw meat. There's no need to rinse your turkey before cooking it. Doing so may spread bacteria to your sink.
- When it comes to utensils, always make sure they're clean. Utensils like knives, large spoons and spatulas are useful for many different things, so make sure they're cleaned after each use.

Thaw your meat safely. Never defrost a turkey, ham or other frozen meats at room temperature. Meats can be safely thawed in the fridge, in the microwave or in cold water that you change every 30 minutes. When thawing in the fridge, cover the meat and place it on a bottom shelf so its juices won't drip on other foods.

Use a food thermometer. This is the only surefire way to verify that food is cooked long enough to kill harmful bacteria. Recommended temperatures for your meat include:

- 145 degrees for ham, or red meats like beef or lamb.
- 160 degrees for ground meats.
- 165 degrees for poultry.

Handle leftovers with care. Harmful bacteria grow quickly at room temperature, so be sure to refrigerate leftovers within two hours after serving. If you store your leftovers in a shallow tray, they will cool down to a safer temperature faster. Reheat any leftovers to 165 degrees before serving again, and



plan to use them all within three to four days. The only safe way to use leftovers later than that is to freeze them.

Enjoy the holidays! Enjoy the food! Just remember to include safety in your planning.

As part of its mission to promote healthy lifestyles, the Platte County Lifestyle Coalition is involved with several local health and wellness programs, including the Walk to Jerusalem, the Complete Health Improvement Program, running clubs at local schools, Walk with a Doc and more. To learn more about the PCLC or how you can become involved, contact Gene Vis, Platte County Lifestyle Coalition coordinator, at 402-562-4686 or edvis@columbushosp.org.