
Holiday Food Safety

What types of illnesses can be caused by improperly handled food?

There are several types of foodborne illnesses, including Salmonella, *E. coli*, Campylobacter, botulism, and norovirus.

What are the dangers of foodborne illnesses?

These illnesses can cause symptoms ranging from a mild stomach upset to vomiting, kidney failure, and even death, depending on the illness, the severity of it, and the health of the person infected. There are an estimated 76 million cases of foodborne illness, 325,000 hospitalizations, and 5,000 deaths each year in the United States due to foodborne disease.

Why should I take extra precautions when handling and preparing food during the holidays?

Food is always a central part of holiday celebrations, and often food is placed out for people to eat longer than it might be otherwise. Plus more people are preparing foods they don't usually cook and more people are eating them, so there is ample possibility that proper precautions and techniques can be overlooked.

What precautions should I take?

There are some simple precautions everyone should always take, not just during the holidays, to reduce the possibility of becoming sick when preparing food, which include:

Separate: Use a separate cutting board for cooked foods and one for raw foods and always wash them after each use. Avoid cross contamination, which is when cooked food comes into contact with raw food or something the raw food has touched, thus contaminating the cooked food. Wash any utensil (knife, spoon, spatula) after preparing one food item before going on to the next.

Clean: Always wash your hands before touching any food. Wash your hands and surfaces (counters, cutting boards) often during food preparation and afterward. Always wash hands when moving from handling raw foods to cooked foods.

Cook: Make sure all meats are thoroughly cooked by using a meat thermometer: turkey, stuffing, and casseroles to 165°F; veal, beef, and lamb roasts to 145°F; and ham, pork, ground beef, and egg dishes to 160°F. When reheating, leftovers should be thoroughly heated to 165°F.

Chill: Refrigerate or freeze leftovers within two hours (one hour if the room temperature is over 80°F). The refrigerator should be maintained at 40°F or lower and the freezer should be at 0°F or lower. Keep hot foods hot, 140°F or hotter, and cold foods cold, 40°F or below. Never defrost food at room temperature, because this allows bacteria to grow. Thaw food in the refrigerator, in a cold-water bath, or in the microwave. When using a microwave for defrosting, meat must be cooked immediately afterward. Marinate foods in the refrigerator.

Report: Report suspected foodborne illnesses to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services by calling 603-271-4496. Often calls from concerned citizens are how outbreaks are first detected. If a public health official calls you to talk about an outbreak, your cooperation is very important, even if you are not ill.

Are there any foods I shouldn't be eating?

You should not consume unpasteurized milk or apple juice because of the risk of Salmonella, *E. coli*, Listeriosis, and other illnesses. You should also not eat raw or runny eggs, unless they have been pasteurized, due to the risk of Salmonella. You should also avoid eating raw and undercooked meat and poultry.

What should I do if I think I have a foodborne illness?

If you think you may be ill with a foodborne illness, contact your healthcare provider. Some foodborne illnesses can become very serious. Be sure to provide a report on what foods you have eaten recently.

For questions about food safety, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health Services, Food Protection Section at 603-271-4589. To report a foodborne outbreak, contact the Infectious Disease Control Section at 603-271-4496 or 1-800-852-3345 x4496. For more information visit the US Department of Agriculture at www.usda.gov, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov, the food safety resource center at www.befoodsafe.org, or the NH Department of Health and Human Services website at www.dhhs.nh.gov.