

Advice for Holiday Cooks

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Whether you're an experienced cook or preparing to host your first holiday gathering, a little food safety advice can go a long way in promoting a healthy and happy holiday dinner.

Avoid Under and Overcooking

Cooking meat to proper internal temperatures ensures the safety of your holiday meal as well as the taste. To make sure your holiday turkey, ham or other dishes are safe and delicious, use a food thermometer to check for doneness.

Watch the Clock

Many holiday meals are buffet or potluck-style. After you set your spread, be sure to set your timer. After two hours, harmful bacteria can multiply rapidly, putting you and your guests at risk of food poisoning. Keep your holiday smorgasbord safe by promptly refrigerating foods below 40°F within two hours. Or, consider keeping a fresh set of food in the fridge and swapping it out at the two-hour mark.

To Stuff or Not to Stuff

Many people cook stuffing inside their holiday turkey but some don't know the proper temperature to which it should be cooked. A whole turkey should reach a minimum internal temperature of 165°F. Check the temperature at the thickest part of the breast, innermost part of the thigh and innermost part of the wing with a thermometer to ensure it's been fully cooked.

Consider cooking the stuffing separately from the bird for uniform doneness and to reduce the risk of undercooked food. If you do choose to cook the turkey and stuffing together, make sure the stuffing also reaches 165°F.

Savoring Leftovers

Eating leftovers from a holiday meal is sometimes as traditional as the meal itself. Whether you reheat leftovers at home or pack a "leftover lunch" to take to work or school, take steps to help keep food safe and delicious.

Always reheat leftover foods to an internal temperature of 165°F and make sure food is not left out of refrigeration for more than two hours. Pack perishable lunch foods in an insulated bag and add an ice pack to make sure foods stay properly chilled.

Festive Twist

A festive holiday drink may not be complete without a colorful garnish of lime or orange. But do you remember to wash fruit before adding it to your drink? Wash ready-to eat fruits such as pears and plums and don't forget to wash fruits with skin such as limes, oranges and lemons as well. This will help to eliminate harmful bacteria that can spread during peeling or cutting.