



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Department of Health offers food preparation tips for a safe holiday season

HONOLULU – With the holiday season in full swing, food safety can sometimes take a back seat to busy schedules and competing priorities as families prepare for festive gatherings. Unfortunately, this can open the door to uninvited guests that may cause foodborne illnesses. The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) offers the following tips to reduce the risk of exposure to foodborne illnesses this holiday season:

PLANNING. When holiday food shopping, visit the supermarket or grocery store last and do not leave perishable foods in the car. Bag raw meat separately to prevent contaminating other foods. Consider bringing a cooler with ice or ice packs to store perishable foods if you have a long drive home after grocery shopping or if you have other errands to run.

PREPARATION. Always wash containers or plates that were previously used to hold or prepare raw meat to prevent contamination since bacteria may be present in the blood of raw meat. Use separate cutting boards for raw meat and ready-to-eat food. Also, prepare all raw meats at the same time separately from other foods to avoid cross contamination of ready-to-eat food.

WASH YOUR HANDS. Do not handle or prepare foods for others if you have been ill and experienced vomiting and/or diarrhea within the past two days. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before handling food and raw meats and after using the bathroom.

WASH ALL FRUITS AND VEGETABLES. Wash all fresh produce under clean, running water thoroughly prior to preparation and serving, whether you got it from your local grocery store, farmer's market or backyard garden.

USE A THERMOMETER WHEN COOKING MEAT. Cook all meat until juices run clear. Use a thermometer to check the temperature by inserting the probe into the thickest portion of the cooked meat. Refer to the following list for different types of meats and their proper "cook-to" temperatures:

- Beef, veal, lamb and fish: at least 145°F.
- Ground beef: at least 155°F.
- Turkey, chicken and other poultry and stuffed foods: at least 165°F.

USE SHALLOW CONTAINERS. When cooking large amounts of food in advance, divide cooked food into shallow containers (less than 2 inches deep) and store in the refrigerator or freezer until serving. When ready to serve, reheat foods rapidly to 165°F. Foods may also be held hot in an oven (set at 200°F to 250°F) or in the refrigerator until it is served.

KEEP HOT FOODS HOT AND COLD FOODS COLD. Foods that have been cooked to the proper temperatures should be held hot at 135°F or higher by using the oven, chaffing dishes, slow cookers or warming trays. Foods to be held cold should be kept at 41°F or lower by nesting dishes in containers of ice. You may also portion out food in small serving trays keeping larger portions chilled or heated. Replace the small serving trays often (every two hours).

REMEMBER THE TWO-HOUR RULE. Perishable foods should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours unless they are being held hot or held cold at proper storage temperatures.

Put away or discard any leftovers after the meal. All meats should be cut off the bone and placed in shallow containers. All other foods should also be placed in shallow containers and refrigerated promptly. Use all leftover foods within three to four days. Freeze leftovers that will not be consumed within this time frame.

INSPECT FOOD CAREFULLY. Whether you're eating at a family potluck or out at your favorite restaurant, make sure to carefully inspect food before you eat it. Even the most practiced food handlers can make mistakes, and there's no way to guarantee food is 100 percent risk free.

Remember to practice safe food handling techniques this holiday season. Festive times call for giving and sharing delicious meals, and not sharing foodborne illness.

If you have any questions, contact the DOH Sanitation Branch by visiting <http://health.hawaii.gov/san/contact-us/>. More holiday food safety tips are offered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at <https://www.cdc.gov/Features/HolidayFoodSafety/index.html>.

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