



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 18, 2021

21-160

Five food safety tips for enjoying holiday meals

HONOLULU – Food safety can help you avoid foodborne illnesses during holiday feasts when you gather with your family or a few close friends. Food safety starts when you bring food home to prepare your meals and continues through the storing of any leftovers.

“Thanksgiving and other holidays are really big for those in our islands, but food safety must be a priority,” said Department of Health Food Safety Branch Chief Peter Oshiro. “If you’re serving fewer people and cooking with your microwave be aware that microwave ovens cook food unevenly so be sure to use your thermometer to check for a consistent safe temperature.”

With complicated, busy schedules and last-minute changes, it may be tempting to cut corners on food safety. When raw meats touch other foods, when produce goes unwashed, or when food is left out for extended periods – all these situations are invitations for bacteria that causes foodborne illnesses. Ease the mental stress and get your guests on board with food safety.

Here are five food safety tips from the Hawai‘i Department of Health to keep in mind through the upcoming holidays to prevent an upset stomach or a trip to the hospital:

- 1) **Plan.** Plan your food shopping so that perishable foods are not left out for a long time. Separate raw meat from other items to prevent contamination and consider bringing an ice chest or insulated bag with ice or ice packs for items that need to be kept cold until you can store them in your refrigerator or freezer at home.
- 2) **Prepare.** To safely thaw a whole frozen turkey, follow one of these options:
 - A) Thaw the turkey in the refrigerator for four to five days before cooking. This is the safest method because the turkey thaws at a consistent, safe temperature.
 - B) Defrost the turkey in a microwave, allow six minutes per pound to thaw and cook it immediately after thawing.

C) Place the turkey in a heavy bag secured with a twist tie, submerge it in a clean sink with cold water and change the water every 30 minutes. Allow between four to 12 hours to thaw, depending on the size of the turkey.

For any containers or plates that were used to hold or prepare raw meat, clean as you go to prevent contamination since bacteria may be present in the blood of raw meat. Use separate cutting boards and utensils for raw meat and ready-to-eat food.

3) Wash. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before preparing food. Do not handle or prepare foods for others if you have been ill and experienced vomiting and/or diarrhea within the past two days. Thoroughly rinse fruits and vegetables with clean water before cutting or preparing.

4) Proper Cooking. Use a thermometer to ensure foods you are cooking reach a safe temperature. For meat, insert the thermometer into the thickest portion, and refer to this [list for different types of meat](#) for their minimum safe-to-eat temperature:

- Turkey, chicken and other poultry and stuffed foods: at least 165°F
- Ground meats: at least 155°F
- Beef, eggs, fish and pork: at least 145°F

5) Store. Hot foods should be held at 135 °F or hotter. Cold foods should be stored at 41°F or cooler. Use shallow containers (fewer than two inches deep) to cool leftovers quickly. Follow the two-hour rule: Perishable foods should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours unless they are being held at proper storage temperatures.

Eat leftover foods within three to four days. Freeze leftovers that will not be eaten within this time frame. For safe food preparation guidelines and more, visit the Department of Health's Food Safety Branch: <https://health.hawaii.gov/san/food-information>

Ease your concerns about foodborne illness and follow these safe food handling techniques, so you can focus on the fellowship that comes with sharing precious time together.

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