

Avoiding Food Poisoning During The Holidays

(NAPSA)—As Thanksgiving and the holiday season approach, more people will be cooking their favorite traditional dishes. It is important to keep in mind that even the healthiest home-cooked foods can become unhealthy if improperly handled, cooked or stored. In fact, most food poisoning does not occur from restaurant food, but from food prepared at home.

Contaminated or unclean food can be very dangerous, especially to children and the elderly. Each year foodborne illnesses kill nearly 9,000 people. They also cause fever, stomach cramps, vomiting, and diarrhea in almost 80 million Americans, or about one in three.

“Food poisoning can be caused by several different bacteria, such as salmonella or botulism,” said Leigh Vinocur, MD, of the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP). “Although certain types of food poisoning can be fatal, most cases run their course in a couple of days.”

Food poisoning symptoms usually begin from two hours to two days after eating the tainted food. The symptoms are similar to those of the flu and should be treated the same. They include headache, nausea, diarrhea and/or vomiting. However, fever is more likely to occur with the flu.

“To prevent dehydration, it’s important to begin sipping water or diluted juice as soon as active vomiting has decreased,” said Dr. Vinocur. “Be aware, adults can handle dehydration much better than small children.”

If symptoms continue for more than 24 hours or if you are unable to tolerate any fluids, contact your primary care doctor or visit the emergency department, advised Dr. Vinocur.

To help prevent food poisoning, always follow recommended precautions for food handling and preparation. Check dates on food labels, refrigerate raw foods and leftovers promptly, and thoroughly wash hands and utensils immediately after handling raw foods.

ACEP suggests the following precautions to prevent contaminating food.



Properly Store Your Food

- Store eggs, raw meat, poultry, and seafood in the refrigerator.
- Use containers to prevent contamination from other foods or kitchen surfaces.
- Your refrigerator should be set at 40°.
- Your freezer should be set at 0°.
- Regularly clean and disinfect the refrigerator and freezer.

Preparing and Cooking Food Precautions

- Wash your hands and clean and disinfect kitchen surfaces before, during and after handling, cooking, and serving food.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables before eating them.
- Defrost frozen food on a plate either in the refrigerator or in a microwave, but not on the counter.
- Cook food immediately after defrosting.
- Use different dishes and utensils for raw foods than you use for cooked foods.

Tips for Storing Leftovers

- Because harmful bacteria grow at room temperature, keep hot food hot at 140° or higher, and keep cold food cold at 40° or cooler. This is especially important during picnics and buffets.
- Do not leave perishable foods out for more than two hours.
- Promptly refrigerate or freeze leftovers in shallow containers or wrapped tightly in bags.
- Basically use common sense and when in doubt, throw it out. It is much cheaper to throw out bad food than it is to pay expensive medical bills or miss work.

For more information on preventing emergencies, visit ACEP online at ACEP.org.