



Cotton County Health Department

For Immediate Release

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Keep Foodborne Illness from Dampening Your Holiday Spirit

For many of us, the holiday season means time for friends, family, and lots of good food. From cooking the turkey to homemade pies, it is easy to forget safe food handling practices during the hustle and bustle. It is estimated that every year, approximately 1 in 6 Americans (or 48 million people) become ill with a foodborne illness. The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) wants to remind everyone that it's important to practice food safety when preparing holiday foods.

The Oklahoma State Department of Health recommends the following food safety tips to prepare your turkey and keep foodborne illness away from your holiday gatherings:

- **Clean:** Wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before, during and after handling food. Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops with hot soapy water after preparing each food item and before you go on to the next food.
- **Separate:** Disease-causing germs can spread from raw food (that should be cooked) to other foods. Use separate cutting boards, and keep raw meats and their juices away from fruits and vegetables.
- **Cook:** Always check the internal temperature of cooked meat, poultry and egg dishes with a food thermometer to make sure that the food is cooked to a safe temperature.
- **Chill:** Refrigerate leftover foods promptly. When foods are left out unrefrigerated, harmful germs multiply quickly. Discard any food left out more than two hours.
- **Ill:** If you have been sick with diarrhea or vomiting, do not prepare food for at least 24 hours after your symptoms have stopped.

Tips for Preparing and Reheating Turkey

Thaw: Allow enough time for a frozen turkey to defrost. Incorrectly thawed turkey can look safe to eat but actually will be undercooked, allowing disease-causing germs to survive inside. For more information about how to properly thaw and cook your holiday turkey please visit <http://www.ok.gov/health2/documents/Holiday%20Cooking.2014.pdf>.

Cook: Use a meat thermometer to be sure that the internal temperature of the turkey is at least 165°F. For stuffed turkeys, the internal temperature of the stuffing must reach 165°F before it is safe to eat; however, the safest way to cook stuffing is to cook in a separate casserole dish.

Store: After the meal, refrigerate remaining foods and leftover turkey within two hours. Eat leftover turkey and stuffing within three to four days, and gravy within one to two days. Reheat leftover gravy to a boil, and thoroughly reheat other leftovers to 165°F.

For other safe holiday food preparation details, please visit the OSDH Acute Disease Service "Food Safety and Foodborne Diseases" website at www.ok.gov/health or contact the Cotton County Health Department at 580-875-6121.

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