

Keep Foodborne Illness from Spoiling Holiday Parties

Extension Nutrition and
Food Science Program

During the holidays, many people gather with family and friends and enjoy special foods. Whether it is New Year's Day or Thanksgiving, keep your holiday festivities memorable—not miserable—by following the FightBAC™ basics of food safety: clean, separate, cook, and chill.

Clean hands, utensils, and food-preparation surfaces often with hot, soapy water.

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before and after handling food, especially raw meat or poultry.
- Make sure the utensils and food-preparation areas, including countertops and cutting boards, are clean. Wash them with soap and hot water after each use.
- After each cleaning, sanitize the countertops with a solution of 1 teaspoon bleach and 1 quart of water. Let the solution stand on the surface for a few minutes, then dry the countertops with a paper towel.
- If you are using cloth towels to wipe up spills and to clean kitchen surfaces, wash them often with soap and hot water, and dry them in the dryer. This will help kill any bacteria that may be on the cloths.

Separate cooked and raw foods to avoid cross-contamination. Cross-contamination occurs when bacteria is spread to food from hands, cutting boards, utensils, or other foods such as raw meat and poultry. In addition to keeping your hands and food-preparation areas clean, here are more ways to prevent cross-contamination:

- Store raw meat, poultry, fish, and seafood in covered containers on the lowest shelf in the refrigerator so the juices do not drip on to other foods.
- Use one cutting board for fresh produce and a separate one for cutting raw meat, fish, seafood, or poultry. Wash the cutting boards with hot, soapy water and then sanitize them after each use.
- Never place cooked food on a plate that has held raw meat, poultry, fish, or seafood unless the plate has been washed thoroughly with hot, soapy water.

Cook food products to safe internal temperatures to kill bacteria that cause foodborne illness.

- Always use a food thermometer to be sure that food has been cooked to the right temperature. The recommended minimum temperatures are given below:
 - Beef, veal, and lamb steaks, roasts, and chops: 145 degrees F
 - Pork (all cuts): 160 degrees F
 - Ground beef, veal and lamb: 160 degrees F
 - Poultry (whole, ground, or parts): 165 degrees F
 - Egg dishes: 160 degrees F
 - Fish: 145 degrees F

After the foods are prepared, make sure they are served soon or kept at 140 degrees F or higher so bacteria don't have a chance to grow.

If you are serving foods to holiday guests buffet-style, plate up extra serving platters and dishes ahead of time and keep them in a hot oven (set at 200 to 250 degrees F). As the food on the buffet is eaten, replace the empty platters and dishes with clean ones filled with foods that have been held at a safe temperature. This will prevent fresh food from being added to food that has been sitting out at room temperature or touched by hands that may or may not have been washed.

Remember: Prepared and perishable foods—hot or cold—that are left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours are not safe to eat and should be thrown away.

Thoroughly reheat holiday leftovers to 165 degrees F before eating. Soups, stews, and gravies should be brought to a boil before serving. If storing leftovers in the refrigerator, use within 2 or 3 days.

Chill perishable foods and leftovers at 40 degrees F or below as soon as possible.

- Keep cold foods cold (40 degrees or colder) until it is time to serve them. This includes dips made with sour cream, yogurt, cottage cheese, or cream cheese. Keep pies, pastries, or cakes with cream or soft meringue fillings in the refrigerator until they are served.
- Use an appliance thermometer to check your refrigerator and freezer temperatures. The refrigerator should be 40 degrees or colder, and the freezer should be 0 degrees or below.
- Chill cooked foods quickly by dividing them into shallow containers before placing them in the refrigerator or freezer.

Don't let germs ruin your favorite holiday foods

During the holidays, we often indulge in special foods such as eggnog, apple cider, homemade cookies, and desserts. Take these steps to make sure that you also do not get a foodborne illness:

- Avoid recipes that use eggs that are partially cooked or that will be eaten raw. Never eat cookie dough or cake batter made with raw eggs.
- Buy commercially prepared eggnog that has been pasteurized, or make your own using the recipe on the following page.
- If you are serving ciders and juices, serve only those that have been pasteurized. Pasteurization kills harmful bacteria. Because unpasteurized juice or cider may be located on the same shelves as those that have been pasteurized, check the label carefully. If the juice or cider has not been pasteurized, the following warning should be on the label:
“WARNING: This product has not been pasteurized and therefore, may contain harmful bacteria that can cause serious illness in children, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems.”

Foodborne illness doesn't take a break during the holidays. By preparing and storing your foods safely, you can keep germs from crashing your holiday parties and help keep yourself, your family, and your guests from getting sick.

For more information

Keep the Holidays Happy. Partnership for Food Safety Education, 2006. http://www.fightbac.org/FDA_Tips_to_Prevent_Foodborne_Illness_This_Holiday_Season. November 2006. <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fsholida.html>

Holiday Eggnog

What you need:

- 1 quart milk
- 6 eggs
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup whipping cream, whipped
- Ground nutmeg
- Rum (optional) Note: Rum and other forms of alcohol are not reliable methods for killing bacteria in food.

How to make it:

1. Wash your hands and food-preparation areas.
 2. Heat the milk in a large saucepan until it is hot. Do not scald or boil it. While the milk is heating, beat together the eggs and salt in a large bowl. Gradually add the sugar.
 3. Slowly add the hot milk mixture to the egg mixture while continuing to stir. Transfer the mixture back to the large saucepan and cook it on medium-low heat. Stir it constantly with a whisk until the mixture thickens and just coats a spoon. Use a food thermometer to make sure the temperature of the egg and milk mixture is 160 degrees F.
 4. Add the vanilla and stir.
 5. Cool the mixture quickly by placing it in a large bowl that can then be placed in another bowl of ice or cold water. Stir it for about 10 minutes.
 6. Cover the bowl of chilled eggnog and place it in the refrigerator until it is completely chilled. This may take several hours or overnight.
 7. Pour the chilled eggnog into a punch bowl or pitcher. Fold in the whipped cream and sprinkle with ground nutmeg.
- Makes 2 quarts.

Produced by AgriLife Communications, The Texas A&M System
Extension publications can be found on the Web at: <http://AgriLifebookstore.org>

Visit the Texas AgriLife Extension Service at <http://AgriLifeextension.tamu.edu>