



News Release

For immediate release: December 23, 2003

(03-202)

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Keep your holidays happy and your leftovers free from food borne illness

OLYMPIA — Each year over one million Washington residents suffer from food borne illness because of food that is improperly prepared or served. During the holidays, when food and leftovers are in abundance, the Washington State Department of Health urges everyone to take precautions when preparing meals and storing leftovers.

Preparing your holiday meal

- **Always wash your hands** before preparing food and after handling raw meats. Use warm water, soap and paper towels. Inadequate hand washing is a leading cause of food borne disease.
- **Clean and sanitize cutting boards, knives and countertops** that come in contact with raw meat. Use an antibacterial cleaner or make your own sanitizer by mixing one teaspoon of bleach per one gallon of water.
- **Clean wiping cloths before each usage**, especially after cleaning raw meat juice.
- **Scrub those veggies**, especially if they are being served raw for a vegetable tray. All produce should be washed by rinsing under cold water rather than by soaking in standing water. Tough-skinned produce, such as cantaloupe, should be scrubbed with a brush or cloth during washing.
- **Be sure meat is thawed.** Frozen or partially frozen meat is easy to undercook.
- **Cook food thoroughly to safe temperatures.** Use a food thermometer to make sure meat is thoroughly cooked:
 - Poultry products (including stuffing) – 180 degrees Fahrenheit (minimum)
 - Pork – 160 degrees Fahrenheit (minimum)
 - Ground meat dishes – 160 degrees Fahrenheit (minimum)
 - All other meat products – 145 degrees Fahrenheit (minimum)

Serving your holiday meal

- **Do not allow perishable food to sit at room temperature** for more than two hours. Keep track - after two hours, refrigerate, reheat or throw it away.
- **Use small serving trays and refill often.** When hosting a holiday gathering, set out moderate servings of food and refill as needed. Larger servings may sit out too long and could cause food borne illness.
- **Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold**
 - Warm foods should be served above 140 degrees Fahrenheit.
 - Cold foods should be kept cold and served at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or cooler. If possible, nest dishes in bowls of ice to keep cool for extended periods of time.

“Last year’s leading cause of food borne illness was from improperly cooled leftovers,” said food safety specialist Janet Anderberg.

What to do with leftovers

- **Refrigerate leftovers immediately.** Do not leave food on the counter to “cool down.” Cut large pieces of meat into smaller portions and cool in uncovered containers in the refrigerator. Use shallow containers for other foods and make sure food depth is not over two inches high. Only cover the container after the food is below 40 degrees Fahrenheit.
- **Reheat all leftovers** (or previously cooked foods) to at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

The Washington State Department of Health Web site has more information on [food safety](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/Pubs/FoodSafetyTips.htm) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/Pubs/FoodSafetyTips.htm>) or visit the [Food and Drug Administration’s Web site](http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/ANSWERS/2003/ANS01263.html) (<http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/ANSWERS/2003/ANS01263.html>) or the [Partnership for Food Safety Education’s Web site](http://www.fightbac.org/holiday_fact.cfm) (http://www.fightbac.org/holiday_fact.cfm).

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for <i>a healthy dose of information</i> .
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