

Safe Food Handling Tips for the Holidays

The holiday season is here – a time when we spend a lot of time eating and snacking with friends, family and co-workers. All of these gatherings are settings where food may be left out for long periods of time, creating a prime opportunity for some sneaky, uninvited guests to present themselves. Those uninvited guests are bacteria, which cause foodborne illness.

The following healthy holiday tips, presented by Beartooth Billings Clinic Public Health, can help minimize the chances of food borne illnesses and outbreaks.

1. **Safe food handling:** Wash hands before and after handling food, and keep kitchen, dishes and utensils clean. Serving food on clean plates – not those previously holding raw meat and poultry – can also prevent contaminating prepared foods.
2. **The two-hour rule:** Foods should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours. Keep track of how long food has been on the table and discard anything there for two hours or more.
3. **Cook foods thoroughly:** If foods are cooked ahead of time for an event, use these minimum temperature guides:

Steaks, roasts and chops, beef, veal, and lamb should be cooked to 145 degrees – pork to 160 degrees.

Ground meats, beef, veal and lamb should be cooked to 160 degrees.

Poultry should reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees.

Use a thermometer to check the internal temperature of turkeys and stuffing. Turkey meat and stuffing are safe to eat as soon as 165 degrees is reached.

4. **Use shallow storage containers.** Divide cooked foods into shallow containers for storage in the refrigerator or freezer until serving. This facilitates rapid, even cooling. Reheat hot foods to 165 degrees. Arrange and serve food on several small platters rather than one large platter. Keep the rest of the food hot in the oven [set at 200-250 degrees] or cold in the refrigerator until serving time. This way food will be held at a safe temperature for a longer period of time.

Following these tips will enable you and your guests to have a safe/illness free holiday. For more information on holiday food preparation, or general health questions, please contact the Beartooth Billings Clinic Public Health Office at 406-446-9941