

Food Safety

Helpful Hints From Experts

A Few Simple Steps For A Safer Fall Kitchen

(NAPSA)—Don't let foodborne illness become the secret ingredient in your favorite fall recipes.

Still an uninvited guest at many events, food poisoning sends more than 100,000 Americans to the hospital each year—and it can also have long-term health consequences.

Fortunately, by following a few simple steps, you can avoid most problems. Here are some tips from the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

- Washing your hands is still a simple but effective way to stop the spread of many illness-causing bacteria anytime of year. And don't forget to rinse your hands well under running water and dry them using a clean towel or air-dry.

- An estimated one-fifth of U.S. households can their own food. However, many home canners are not aware of the risk for botulism, a rare but potentially fatal form of food poisoning that has been linked to improperly canned food. The bacteria that cause botulism, *Clostridium botulinum*, are found in soil and can survive, grow, and produce a toxin in sealed jars of food.

The only protection against botulism food poisoning in low-acid home canned foods is the heat applied during canning. Using traditional methods that were handed down over generations or using boiling water instead of a pressure cooker can be deadly. Consult the USDA's "Complete Guide to Home Canning" to ensure you are canning safely.

- If you are serving food at a fall party, remember to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Hot foods should be held at 140° F or warmer.

On the buffet table, you can keep hot foods hot with chafing



Leaving food on a counter to thaw can be dangerous. Instead, thaw frozen food in the refrigerator, cold water or the microwave.

dishes, slow cookers and warming trays. Cold foods should be held at 40° F or colder. You can keep foods cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice. Otherwise, use small serving trays and replace them as needed.

- If you are cooking foods ahead of time for your party, be sure to cook them thoroughly to safe minimum internal temperatures—145° F for steaks, roasts and chops with a three-minute rest time, 160° F for ground meat and 165° F for poultry and ground poultry, as measured with a food thermometer.

- If you're making seasonal cookies, never eat raw cookie dough. The uncooked eggs in the dough may contain salmonella or other harmful bacteria.

To learn more, visit the website at www.fsis.usda.gov or call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854). Or ask a food safety question anytime at www.askkaren.gov.