

# Holiday Cooking

## Keeping Holiday Meals Safe

(NAPSA)—American holidays are big on tradition and great food. But holiday meals can take a turn for the worse if food safety isn't a key ingredient in preparing and cooking the food.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), food-borne illness takes a significant toll on public health in the U.S., and is responsible for approximately 14 deaths every day.

To help consumers reduce the risk of food-borne illness during holiday gatherings, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service is providing some important safety tips through its **Be Food Safe** campaign ([www.befoodsafe.gov](http://www.befoodsafe.gov)). The campaign encourages consumers to:

- **Clean**—Wash hands, surfaces and utensils often to avoid spreading bacteria when preparing food. Hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of food-borne illness.

- **Separate**—Use different cutting boards for meat, poultry, seafood and veggies. Be sure to keep the raw turkey, roasts, ground beef and other meats separate from other side dishes when preparing meals.

- **Cook**—You can't tell if it's done by how it looks. Use a food thermometer. Every part of the turkey or chicken should reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F. For roasts and steaks, make sure the temperature reads 145°F; meals involving ground beef, pork and egg dishes should be cooked to 160°F.

- **Chill**—Keep the fridge at 40°F or below to keep bacteria from growing. Pies and other



**It's important to practice food safety during the holidays and throughout the year.** 

dishes made with eggs should always be refrigerated. Leftovers should be refrigerated within two hours.

The USDA also suggests these food safety resources:

- **Ask Karen**—USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service virtual representative can answer your questions 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Visit [www.askkaren.gov](http://www.askkaren.gov).

- **USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline**—Food safety experts are available year-round from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern Time to answer questions in English and Spanish about safely preparing and cooking foods. The toll-free number is (888) MPHHotline (888-674-6854). You can also e-mail questions to [MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov](mailto:MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov).

- **Food Safety Education Fact Sheets**—These publications are available on USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service Web site at [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov).