

Food Safety

HELPFUL HINTS FROM EXPERTS

Share The Bounty Safely To Prevent Foodborne Illness

(NAPSA)—Throughout the year, food banks, religious and civic groups and many other organizations work tirelessly to provide donated food to those in need. For many, these gifts are more than just a single meal. Rather, they make it possible for those in need to have an occasion where they can enjoy the company of family and friends and the memories that come from such a gathering.

But whether you are a provider or a recipient, donated food must be handled with care in order to prevent foodborne illness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 76 million people suffer from foodborne illness each year and 5,000 people die as a result. Moreover, foodborne illness affects the most vulnerable populations—older adults, young children and those with compromised immune systems—more so than others.

Fortunately, foodborne illness is preventable. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) encourages everyone who delivers, handles or prepares food this holiday season to learn about the basic food safety messages that will help prevent foodborne illness.

Perishable foods can cause illness when mishandled. The basic rule of thumb is to keep hot food hot and cold food cold. Keep hot food at 140°F or above, while cold food should be kept at 40°F or below. Discard all perishable foods such as meat, poultry, eggs and casseroles left at room temperature longer than two hours; one hour in air temperatures above 90°F.

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) has an



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array of information available to help consumers prepare safe, easy and delicious meals. One of the best resources is the toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-888-MPHOTLINE.

“There are many food safety challenges associated with holiday meals,” says USDA's Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Richard Raymond. “People may not have a lot of practice roasting turkey or cooking hams, they may not be used to cooking for larger groups, and foods tend to sit out on the table for long periods of time.”

By following the four basic food safety steps, you and your guests can have a meal that is both delicious and safe:

- Clean—Wash hands and surfaces often.
- Separate—Don't allow cross-contamination between raw and cooked foods.
- Cook—Cook food to the safe internal temperature. Check temperature with a food thermometer.
- Chill—Refrigerate or freeze promptly.

For more helpful information on food safety, visit www.fsis.usda.gov.