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## DON'T INVITE FOODBORNE ILLNESSES TO THE HOLIDAY TABLE



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**PASCO COUNTY, Fla.** – Share holiday meals with relatives, friends and neighbors, but make sure not to invite foodborne illnesses to the table. Foodborne illnesses can bring on severe symptoms and lead to hospitalizations or, in extreme cases, even prove fatal. Each year, about 3,000 deaths are attributed to contaminated food. Symptoms may happen within minutes and the sick person may have nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or fever at first.

Babies, children, pregnant women, older adults and people with compromised immune systems are at greater risk for these illnesses, but everyone who eats is at risk. Prevention is the best strategy.

The Florida Department of Health in Pasco County (DOH-Pasco) urges everyone to practice food safety as part of its public health mission, but the message is timely now as holiday meals in November and December are planned. Microorganisms can cause diseases that ruin holiday gatherings; safe cooking and storage practices can prevent them.

Use these tips to keep your holidays happy and healthy for all:

- Wash hands, utensils and surfaces often, especially before and after preparing food.
- Cook foods to proper internal temperatures. A food thermometer is essential.
- Refrigerate or freeze all perishables and leftovers within two hours.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, eggs and seafood away from other foods.
- Never leave the holiday meal items out for snacking later. Turkey, stuffing, gravy and other foods need to go to the fridge instead of sitting out for noshing.
- Don't thaw the holiday bird on the counter. Use the fridge or thaw in cold running water.

Call the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-888-MPHotline (888-674-6854) for more information about safe practices. USDA has more information on foodborne illnesses on its website at [https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/foodborne-illness-and-disease/foodborne-illness-what-consumers-need-to-know/ct\\_index/](https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/foodborne-illness-and-disease/foodborne-illness-what-consumers-need-to-know/ct_index/).

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