



Extension News Column

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Re: Pinching Pennies to run Mondays on page A-3
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It's the holiday season — the time for good food with family and friends. However, foodborne illness can really put a damper on all that fun.

Foodborne illnesses cost the United States \$152 billion a year, a tab that works out to an average cost of \$1,850 each time someone gets sick from food.

Typical symptoms of foodborne illness are vomiting, diarrhea and flu-like symptoms, which can start anytime from hours to days after contaminated food or drinks are consumed.

The symptoms usually are not longlasting in healthy people — a few hours or a few days — and usually go away without medical treatment. But foodborne illness can be severe and even life threatening to anyone, especially those most at risk: older adults; infants and young children; pregnant women; people with HIV/AIDS, cancer or any condition that weakens their immune system; and people who take medicines that suppress the immune system, for example, some medicines for rheumatoid arthritis.

Combating bacteria, viruses, parasites and other contaminants in our food supply is a high priority for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. But consumers have a role to play, too, especially when it comes to safe food-handling practices in the home.

The good news is that practicing four basic food safety measures can help prevent foodborne illness: clean, separate, cook and chill.

Clean. The first rule of safe food preparation in the home is to keep everything clean.

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling any food. If the 20 seconds is hard to keep up with, this means the time it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice.
- Wash food-contact surfaces (cutting boards, dishes, utensils, countertops) with hot, soapy water after preparing each food item and before going on to the next item.
- Rinse fruits and vegetables thoroughly under cool running water and use a produce brush to remove surface dirt.
- Do not rinse raw meat and poultry before cooking. Washing these foods makes it more likely for bacteria to spread to areas around the sink and countertops.

Separate. Don't give bacteria the opportunity to spread from one food to another (cross-contamination).

- Keep raw eggs, meat, poultry, seafood and their juices away from foods that won't be cooked. Take this precaution while shopping in the store, when storing in the refrigerator at home, and while preparing meals.
- Consider using one cutting board only for foods that will be cooked (such as raw meat, poultry and seafood) and another one for those that will not (such as raw fruits and vegetables).
- Keep fruits and vegetables that will be eaten raw separate from other foods such as raw meat, poultry or seafood — and from kitchen utensils used for those products.
- Do not put cooked meat or other food that is ready to eat on an unwashed plate that has held any raw eggs, meat, poultry, seafood or their juices.

Cook. Food is safely cooked when it reaches a high enough internal temperature to kill harmful bacteria.

- Color is not a reliable indicator of doneness. Use a food thermometer to make sure meat, poultry and fish are cooked to a safe internal temperature. To check a turkey for safety, insert a food thermometer into the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. The turkey is safe when the temperature reaches 165°F. If the turkey is stuffed, the temperature of the stuffing should be 165°F.
- Bring sauces, soups and gravies to a rolling boil when reheating.
- Cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm. When making your own eggnog or other recipe calling for raw eggs, use pasteurized shell eggs, liquid or frozen pasteurized egg products, or powdered egg whites.
- Don't eat uncooked cookie dough, which may contain raw eggs.

Chill. Refrigerate foods quickly because harmful bacteria grow rapidly at room temperature.

- Refrigerate leftovers and takeout foods — and *any* type of food that should be refrigerated — within two hours. That includes pumpkin pie!

- Set your refrigerator at or below 40°F and the freezer at 0°F. Check both periodically with an appliance thermometer.
- Never defrost food at room temperature. Food can be defrosted safely in the refrigerator, under cold running water or in the microwave. Food thawed in cold water or in the microwave should be cooked immediately.
- Allow the correct amount of time to properly thaw food. For example, a 20-pound turkey needs four to five days to thaw completely when thawed in the refrigerator.
- Don't taste food that looks or smells questionable. A good rule to follow is, "When in doubt, throw it out."

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