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Keep Holiday Food Safe with These Four Safety Steps

DECEMBER 23RD 2016 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Christmas, Kwanzaa, and Hanukah all fall within three days of each other this year. As friends and families gather together this season, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety Inspection Service has four food safety tips to ensure a healthy and safe holiday.

Even on Holidays, Always Follow the Four Steps to Food Safety

Clean hands before food preparation by following these simple steps: wet hands, lather with soap, scrub for at least 20 seconds, rinse with clean warm water and dry hands with a clean towel. Always serve food on clean plates and avoid reusing plates that previously held raw meat and poultry.

Separate raw and cooked foods to avoid cross contamination, which is transferring bacteria from raw food onto ready-to-eat food. For example, when preparing a roast and raw veggies for a dip platter, keep the raw meat from coming into contact with the vegetables, or food that does not require further cooking such as sliced, cooked meat and cheese.

Cook using a food thermometer to make sure food reaches a safe minimum internal temperature. Cook all raw beef, pork, lamb and veal steaks, chops, and roasts to a minimum internal temperature of 145 °F as measured with a food thermometer before

removing meat from the heat source. For safety and quality reasons, allow meat to rest for at least three minutes before carving or consuming.

Cook all raw ground beef, pork, lamb, and veal to an internal temperature of 160 °F as measured with a food thermometer. Cook all poultry to a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F as measured with a food thermometer. When transporting hot, cooked food from one location to another, keep it hot by carrying it in an insulated container. For more information about food thermometers, visit FoodSafety.gov

Chill leftovers within two hours of cooking. Keep track of how long items have been sitting on the buffet table and discard anything out longer than two hours. Never leave perishable foods, such as meat, poultry, eggs and casseroles in the “Danger Zone” over two hours. The danger zone is between 40 and 140 °F where bacteria multiply rapidly. After two hours, enough bacteria may have grown to make partygoers sick. Exceptions to the danger zone include ready-to-eat items like cookies, crackers, bread and whole fruit.

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