

The Cincinnati Drug and Poison Information Center Offers Poison Prevention Tips for Holiday Cooking

Handling food safely can help ensure a happy holiday season. Oftentimes, the best part about the holidays is spending time with family ... and eating of course! However, even for an experienced chef, cooking a feast for a large group can be quite daunting. It's important to follow safe food handling guidelines so that your guests leave with full bellies and not food poisoning.

Food poisoning is generally a mild illness that most commonly results from poor food handling practices. Food poisoning usually occurs two to six hours after eating the contaminated food and can include nausea, fever, vomiting, stomach cramps and diarrhea. Depending on the exact type of food poisoning, how your body reacts to the toxin and the amount of contaminated food that was eaten, symptoms may last from several hours to two or three days. Food poisoning can be serious for people in poor health, for the very young and the elderly.

Practicing basic food safety preparation and storage is the best way to protect against food poisoning. Experts at the Cincinnati Drug and Poison Information Center offer the following recommendations to prevent food poisonings:

- Wash hands with soap and warm running water for at least 15 to 20 seconds before preparing any foods and especially after handling raw meat, poultry, fish or eggs.
- Keep preparation and storage areas clean; this includes countertops, stovetops and refrigerators.
- Wash utensils between each use. Never reuse utensils; this is a source of contamination.
- Do not defrost meat or poultry on the counter at room temperature. Thaw it in the refrigerator or microwave instead.
- Use a meat thermometer to confirm that meat, pork and poultry are properly cooked; visit www.foodsafety.gov for proper temperatures.
- Do not prepare food if you are sick or have any type of nose or eye infection.
- Store raw food below cooked food in the refrigerator so raw food cannot drip into cooked food and contaminate it.
- Use separate cutting boards for meats, poultry and fish.

To ensure that the leftovers will be just as good the next day, properly seal and store leftovers in the refrigerator as soon as possible. Leaving perishable foods, including meats and dairy products, out longer than two hours significantly increases the risk of food poisoning. Throw food away if you are unsure how long it has been sitting out.

Be sure to keep these tips in mind as you cook and entertain family and friends this holiday season. If you have questions about food poisoning or any other poison exposure, call the Cincinnati Drug and Poison Information Center at 1-800-222-1222.