

Don't Spoil the Holidays

– Put Food Safety on the Menu –

(Newark, NJ) The kickoff to the holidays is about to begin with Thanksgiving on deck. Besides spending time with family, the next best thing about the holidays is of course – EATING! Family recipes passed down from generation to generation will take their place on holiday menus. Unfortunately, there are dangers that lurk in the kitchen and home that can spoil the holidays.

Here are a few common questions the NJ Poison Control Center receives on Thanksgiving.

- I cooked the turkey with the plastic on. Is it safe to eat?
- I ate stuffing cooked in the turkey. Will I get sick?
- My dog ate chocolate left on the table. What should I do?
- My 3 year old swallowed two of my mother-in-law's blood pressure pills. What should I do?

Even experienced family chefs can find cooking a holiday feast for a large group of people stressful and even overwhelming. Remember, it's never too early to start planning and preparing. Waiting until the last minute often cause people to take short cuts when it comes to safe food handling practices; putting their guests at risk for leaving the table with more than just full bellies!

Quick facts about food poisoning.

- Food poisoning can happen just a few hours after consuming contaminated food.
- Some symptoms are nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, diarrhea, and fever.
- The effects of food poisoning are not always immediate.

Forgetting about food safety is a recipe for disaster," says Diane Calello, MD, NJ Poison Control Center Executive and Medical Director, Rutgers NJ Medical School. "It's important to remember that you should not be preparing food if you are feeling sick or have any type of respiratory illness or infection. This puts your guests at risk of becoming ill."

It's simple to avoid food poisoning. Follow a few tips while preparing your holiday meal:

1. Shopping

While food shopping is fun, you should keep in mind a few things:

- Take care to keep poultry, meat, and seafood items separate from produce.
- Make sure everything is in its own bag. You can even double-bag items to be extra safe!
- Keep meat, fish, poultry, and eggs last on your list. If these stay out of the fridge and in your cart for a long time, they can become contaminated.

- Finally, you might be tired after a long shopping trip, but make sure to freeze or refrigerate all meat, poultry, seafood, and dairy products.

2. Preparation

Take these precautions while preparing your meal.

- Don't defrost your turkey on the counter. Leave it in the refrigerator for a few days.
- Wash fruits and vegetables well and ensure that they don't touch any surfaces exposed to raw meats.
- Use separate cutting boards, dishes, and utensils for cooked and uncooked foods, and make sure to wash them between uses.
- Don't forget one of the most important things – wash your hands with warm water and soap!

3. Cooking

Whether you try difficult recipes or stick to a traditional family dish, it's important you cook food properly.

- Use a food thermometer to determine whether your turkey has been cooked enough.
- Check out www.foodsafety.gov for proper temperatures for turkeys and other foods.

4. Serving

Time to eat!

- It may seem like a good idea to make all your holiday food earlier on, but it is not safe to leave cooked foods sitting out on the counter for more than two hours.
- Use a warming tray or chafing dish to keep food warm (140°F or above).¹
- Similarly, don't leave foods that are meant to be cold out on the counter more than two hours.

5. Storage

Odds are you will probably end up with leftovers from your holiday meal. It is important to store them properly. Even if foods are cooked, they are still at risk for contamination.

- Keep leftovers in the fridge and make sure your refrigerator is set between 40°F and 32°F.²
- Food in the freezer can be kept longer, but again, set it to the right temperature of 0°F or below.²
- When you reheat foods, make sure they are hot enough.
- If you're using a microwave, check that the food's temperature has reached 165°F or higher.¹

Food poisoning can be serious. If at any time during the preparing/cooking process you are uncertain of something or think a food poisoning situation may have occurred, don't hesitate to get help. Call the NJ Poison Control Center unless the person is unconscious,

not breathing, hard to wake up, or seizing then call 9-1-1. Poison control centers are a great resource for information and emergencies. Keep us at your fingertips. Save the Poison Help number (1-800-222-1222) as a contact in your cell phone.

Help is Just a Phone Call Away!

We are social. Join us on Facebook ([@NJPIES](#)) and Twitter ([@NJPoisonCenter](#)) for breaking news, safety tips, trivia questions, etc.

Real People. Real Answers.

¹ FoodSafety.gov. [Check Your Steps - Cook.](#)

² FoodSafety.gov. [Check Your Steps – Chill.](#)

Available for Media Interviews

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About NJPIES

Chartered in 1983, the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System (NJPIES) is New Jersey's only poison control center. Medical professionals such as physicians, registered nurses and pharmacists offer free consultation through hotline services (telephone, text and chat) regarding poison emergencies and provide information on poison prevention, drugs, food poisoning, animal bites and more. In addition, it tracks incidences of adverse reactions to food, drugs and vaccines in order to monitor potential public health issues and provide data to the New Jersey Department of Health, U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NJPIES' confidential services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year. When needed, NJPIES responds to other emergent health issues by expanding hotline services.

NJPIES is designated as the state's regional poison control center by the New Jersey Department of Health and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It is a division of the Department of Emergency Medicine of Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. NJPIES has a state-of-the-art center located at Rutgers Health Sciences in Newark. NJPIES is funded, in part, by the NJ Department of Health, NJ Hospitals and the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

New Jersey residents should save the Poison Help number, 1-800-222-1222, in their mobile phones and post the number somewhere visible in their home. NJPIES is also available via text [8002221222@njpies.org](tel:8002221222) and chat www.njpies.org.

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Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS) is the health care education, research, and clinical division of Rutgers University, comprising nine schools and their attendant faculty practices, centers, institutes and clinics; New Jersey's leading comprehensive cancer care center; and New Jersey's largest behavioral health care network.

