



Public Health
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Knox County Health Department

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PRESS RELEASE

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For more information

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Spread Cheer, Not Germs, at Holiday Gatherings

Knox County, IL - Holidays are a wonderful time of celebration that includes food, family and friends. Holidays may also bring more cooks into the kitchen — and maybe a greater chance for unsafe handling of food to occur.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that each year up to 76 million people are affected by food-borne illnesses. The symptoms include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain or even fevers. One cause of these illnesses is germs and bacteria that are spread when food is not safely handled.

You can help prevent food-borne illnesses at home by making sure that all the cooks in your kitchen, including yourself, follow these food safety tips. Heidi Britton, Knox County Health Department Administrator, wants to remind our residents that, *“During the holiday season when preparing your holiday meal, remember to wash your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds under warm water. This is one of the easiest ways to prevent contamination of other foods and the best way to prevent spreading illness”*. When washing your hands vigorously scrub, clean under fingernails, between fingers and when you dry your hands use a clean paper towel each time. Never use your apron or a common dish towel to dry your hands.

Britton also reminds to, *“Follow the CDC guidelines for thawing and cooking meat for the prevention of food-borne illness. For refrigeration and storage guidelines, use the rule of 2’s which is to refrigerate food after it has been sitting out for 2 hours, place cooked food in the refrigerator within 2 hours of cooking and storage containers should be less than 2 inches deep and airtight.”* Bacteria spreads fastest at temperatures between 40 °F and 140 °F, so chilling food properly (keep a constant refrigerator temperature of 40 °F or below) is one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of food-borne illness.

If you are ever in doubt if your leftovers are still fresh, throw them out!

Don't let harmful bacteria ruin your holiday fun this year. Simply keep these tips in mind when preparing, cooking, serving and storing food to have a happy, safe holiday!

For more information about food safety during the holidays please visit <http://www.holidayfoodsafety.org/> or contact the Knox County Health Department at 309-344-2224.