

Keep holiday meals festive and safe

December 25 2014



Experts offer advice on how to properly cook and serve fare.

(HealthDay)—Holiday parties and home-cooked meals offer plenty of opportunities for germs to find their way into food.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service offers advice about keeping [food](#) safe.

At the store:

- To prevent cross-contamination, separate raw meat, poultry and seafood from other foods in the grocery cart. Ask for these foods to be placed in separate bags at the checkout counter.
- Buy cold foods at the end of your shopping trip so they won't get too hot on the way home.

While preparing food:

- Use separate cutting boards to cut raw meat and to cut

vegetables, bread and other ready-to-eat items.

- To prevent cross-contamination, prepare uncooked recipes before cooking raw meat. Once these food items are prepared, separate them from meat dishes.
- Use a meat thermometer—not just an oven thermometer—to make sure dishes are properly cooked to the appropriate internal temperature.
- Cook fresh beef, pork, veal and lamb to 145 degrees Fahrenheit. Other appropriate temperatures are 145 F for fish, 160 F for egg dishes, ground beef, veal and lamb, and 165 F for poultry.

When cooking for groups:

- Use chafing dishes and slow cookers to keep hot food hot (above 140 F) and use ice trays to keep cold food cold (below 40 F).
- Put perishable food in the trash after two hours.

While cooking a roast:

- Use separate cutting boards, plates and utensils for roast to avoid cross-contamination.
- Sanitize items that have touched [raw meat](#), like cutting boards, by washing them with warm soap and water, or placing them in the dishwasher.
- Make sure the roast has reached 145 F by using a meat thermometer. Let all cuts of beef—plus pork, veal and lamb—rest for three minutes before cutting or eating.

More information: For more details about food safety, try the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#).

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Citation: Keep holiday meals festive and safe (2014, December 25) retrieved 25 March 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-12-holiday-meals-festive-safe.html>

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