

GIVE THE GIFT OF SAFE FOOD THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

By Clara Wicoff



Looking to give the perfect gift this holiday season? There's one gift which everyone on your list will be sure to appreciate: the gift of safe food.

When it comes to preparing safe food for holiday gatherings, you are in control. Ensuring you follow safe food handling guidelines is the best protection against the spread of foodborne illnesses caused by bacteria like Salmonella and E. coli O157:H7. These bacteria may be uninvited guests at your gathering. To stop their spread, follow these four core food safety practices: clean, separate, cook, and chill.



Clean: Wash your hands and kitchen surfaces often. According to the Partnership for Food Safety Education, a recent study found that 65 percent of consumers do not wash their hands before preparing a meal. This misstep can have dangerous consequences, since bacteria can spread through contact with kitchen surfaces and food. You should wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food, as well as after

using the bathroom or handling pets.

Separate: Those pesky foodborne bacteria spread through cross-contamination. To prevent this spread, you should separate raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs from other foods. This separation should be maintained in your shopping cart at the grocery store, inside your refrigerator, and during meal preparation. Never place cooked food on a surface (such as a cutting board or plate) which previously held raw meat, poultry, seafood, or eggs without first washing the surface with hot water and soap.

Cook: Color is not a reliable indicator of food safety! Use a food thermometer to ensure the internal temperature of cooked foods is high enough to kill the bacteria which cause foodborne illnesses. Insert the thermometer in the thickest part of the food, and clean it with hot water and soap after each use. Beef and pork should be cooked to 145°, while ground meats should be cooked to 160°. Poultry and leftovers should be cooked to 165°.

Chill: Refrigerate foods promptly to slow the spread of bacteria. Temperatures below 40° will slow their growth. All perishables, prepared foods, and leftovers should be refrigerated or frozen within two hours.

Remember to clean, separate, cook, and chill this holiday season so you can give your loved ones the gift of safe food. For more information, please contact Clara Wicoff, Nutrition, Food and Health Extension Agent, at clarawicoff@ksu.edu or by calling 620-365-2242.