

# Play it safe with holiday foods

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(HealthDay)—When preparing the Thanksgiving feast this week, don't forget food safety, a medical expert says.

Each year, about 48 million Americans get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized and 3,000 die of food poisoning, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Forgetting about food safety is a recipe for disaster," said Dr. Diane Calello, executive and medical director of the New Jersey Poison Control Center at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School's department of emergency medicine.

"Don't prepare food if you have any kind of respiratory illness or infection, as this puts your guests at risk of becoming ill. No matter how busy your kitchen gets during the holidays, always remember the risks of improperly handling food," Calello said in a Rutgers University news release.

There are four steps to [food safety](#): clean, separate, cook and chill.

Use [warm water](#) and soap to wash your hands and surfaces often during [food preparation](#). Rinse all vegetables. Avoid cross-contamination by keeping raw meats and seafood separate from other food when [grocery shopping](#) and in the refrigerator, and by using separate cutting boards during preparation.

Never thaw frozen food on the counter. Do it in the refrigerator, in cold water or in the microwave. Foodborne germs—such as bacteria, parasites, viruses—can grow very quickly in foods left at room temperature for more than two hours, Calello said.

Use a food thermometer to make sure foods are cooked to a safe internal temperature. Refrigerate perishable food within two hours.

Symptoms of food poisoning can begin a few hours after eating contaminated food and include nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, diarrhea and fever.

Everyone is at risk for food poisoning, but people such as young children, [pregnant women](#) and those with weakened immune systems from medical conditions are more likely to get sick and develop a serious illness.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [food safety](#).

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