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For Immediate Release

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Food Safety for the Holidays

The holidays are here, and Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) would like to remind all our residents about the importance of safe food handling and storage. “Taking precautions to prevent the most common types of food poisoning when preparing food at home will help you enjoy your holiday meal,” states Melissa Propp RN, Public Health Nurse at SWNPHD.

Follow these steps recommended by the US Department of Agriculture to prevent foodborne illnesses during your holiday celebrations.

Clean: Wash your hands and surfaces often.

- Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water before, during, and after preparing food and before eating.
- Wash your utensils, cutting boards, and countertops with hot, soapy water.
- Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running water.

Separate: Don't cross-contaminate surfaces - use separate cutting boards and plates for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.

- When grocery shopping, keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and their juices away from other foods.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs separate from all other foods in the fridge.
- USDA advises against washing your turkey; however, if you do wash your turkey in the sink, fully clean and sanitize your sink afterwards.

Thaw Safely: USDA recommends thawing a turkey in a refrigerator since this allows for slow and safe thawing.

- Plan for about 24 hours for every four to five pounds of turkey.
- After thawing, it is safe to store in the refrigerator for one to two days.
- Turkey can also be thawed in a cold-water bath or microwave; however, it must be cooked immediately after it has thawed using these methods.
- If using the cold-water method, allow 30 minutes per pound and submerge the turkey in its original wrapping to avoid cross-contamination.

Cook: To the right temperature

- Use a food thermometer to ensure foods are cooked to a safe internal temperature. Check the chart below for a detailed list of foods and temperatures.

Safe Cooking Temperatures Chart

145°F	whole cuts of beef, pork, veal, and lamb (then allow the meat to rest for 3 minutes before carving or eating)
160°F	ground meats, such as beef and pork
165°F	all poultry, including ground chicken and turkey
165°F	leftovers and casseroles, including turkey stuffing
145°F	fresh ham (raw)
145°F	fin fish or cook until flesh is opaque

Stuffing a Turkey: USDA does not recommend stuffing a turkey because it can be a breeding ground for bacteria if not prepared carefully. If doing so, keep these steps in mind.

- The wet and dry ingredients for the stuffing should be prepared separately from each other and refrigerated until ready to use.
- Stuff the turkey loosely — about 3/4 cup of stuffing per pound.
- Immediately place the stuffed, raw turkey in an oven set no lower than 325 F.
- The internal temperature of the stuffing inside the bird should reach 165 degrees.

Chill: Refrigerate any leftovers right away.

- Refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours of being cooked.
- Bacteria can multiply rapidly if left at room temperature or in the “Danger Zone” between 40°F and 140°F. Never leave perishable food out for more than 2 hours (or 1 hour if it’s hotter than 90°F outside).
- Keep your refrigerator at 40°F or below and know when to throw food out.

For more information, contact Melissa Propp at 308-345-4223 or call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854). SWNPHD serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. SWNPHD is located at 404 West 10th in McCook. Information can also be found on SWNPHD’s Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

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