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CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH OFFERS FOOD SAFETY TIPS FOR HOLIDAY FEASTS

SACRAMENTO – Dr. Mark Horton, director of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), reminded Californians today about the importance of safe food handling during the holiday season to prevent food borne illness.

“Thorough cooking, adequate refrigeration, good hand washing and work area hygiene are the key food handling practices that can prevent food borne illness,” Horton said. “Properly prepared and handled foods will help ensure a safe meal every day of the year.”

CDPH recommends the following food safety practices:

Keep hands and food contact surfaces clean; wash them often:

- Always wash your hands with warm, soapy water before and after handling raw foods. Dry hands with a clean, single-use paper towel. People with cuts or skin infections on their hands should not prepare food.
- Thoroughly clean all work surfaces, utensils and dishes with hot soapy water and rinse with hot water before and after each use. Knives, cutting boards and meat grinders should be washed thoroughly before using them for other foods.

Keep foods separate; don't cross contaminate:

- Always wash fruits and vegetables in clean sinks under running water and keep fruits and vegetables away from raw meats, poultry, eggs, fish and any other raw animal product.
- When tasting food, ladle a small amount of it into a small dish and taste with a clean spoon. Remove the dish and spoon from the area and clean when finished.

Refrigerate foods promptly after purchase:

- Refrigerate or freeze meat, poultry and seafood promptly after purchase. Perishable items, such as eggs, fresh fruit juices and pre-packaged fruits and

vegetables, including salad mixes, must be stored under refrigeration. Check “expiration” or “use by” dates before consuming these products.

- Prevent meat, poultry and seafood juices from spilling on and contaminating other foods or surfaces both at the market and at home. Refrigeration should be kept at 41 degrees or colder.
- Thaw frozen meat, poultry and seafood inside the refrigerator in its original wrapping. Thawing a moderate-sized turkey in this manner may take two to four days. If time does not permit a gradual thaw, place the frozen turkey in a watertight wrapper and immerse in cold -- not hot or warm -- water until the meat is pliable. Change the water every half hour. Turkey may also be defrosted in the microwave, but must be cooked immediately after microwave thawing.

Cook foods to proper temperatures:

- Rinse poultry and seafood thoroughly in cold water and drain well before cooking.
- Always use a meat thermometer to ensure that meat is thoroughly cooked.
 - Turkey should be placed immediately in a preheated oven set no lower than 325 degrees. Turkey, other poultry or ground poultry should be cooked to an internal temperature of 165 degrees to kill pathogens (germs) that may be present. To accurately measure the temperature, insert a thermometer in the thickest part of the turkey thigh, but not against the bone. Turkey meat is thoroughly cooked when the hip joint moves easily and the juices run clear -- not pink. Stuffing should be cooked separately and heated to an internal temperature of 165 degrees.
 - Beef, veal, and lamb steaks, roasts and chops should be cooked to at least 145 degrees.
 - Ground beef, veal and lamb should be cooked to at least 160 degrees.
 - Pork should be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 160 degrees.
 - Stuffed meat, poultry and fish and any food stuffed with fish, meat or poultry should be heated to a minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees.
 - Eggs and foods containing raw eggs should be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 145 degrees.
- When leftovers are eaten hot, they should be heated to at least 165 degrees or until hot and steaming throughout.
- Cooking times in microwaves may vary because ovens vary in power and efficiency. Cooking whole, stuffed poultry in a microwave is not recommended. Always use a thermometer to ensure that foods are thoroughly cooked. The stuffing might not reach the temperature needed to destroy harmful bacteria. Foods cooked or reheated in microwaves should be stirred or turned occasionally to ensure that all

parts of the food are thoroughly cooked. If using frozen meat, first microwave the meat until completely thawed, then follow by cooking. If microwaving is not possible, then allow at least one-and-a-half times the usual cooking time to ensure that the meat is sufficiently cooked throughout.

Refrigerate leftovers:

- Turkey should be refrigerated one of two ways: Within two hours after it is cooked; or right after cooking, the turkey should be de-boned, sliced or pulled into pieces no more than 2 1/2 inches thick and refrigerated in shallow containers. Store the meat, stuffing and stock in separate containers in the refrigerator or freezer.
- Do not eat leftover meat that has been refrigerated for longer than four days or leftover stuffing or gravy refrigerated for longer than two days. If properly wrapped, leftover meat may be safely consumed after being frozen for one to three months.
- Keep refrigerated all cream, custard and meringue pies and any other foods with custard filling, except when being served.

Resources for information on food safety include the federal Food and Drug Administration Food Information Hotline at (888) SAFE FOOD and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Meat and Poultry Hotline at (800) 535-4555 or www.fsis.usda.gov. Consumers can also access the national Partnership for Food Safety Education's "Fight BAC" (bacteria) Web page at <http://www.fightbac.org/>.