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Social Services | Public Health | Mental Health

news release

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Make holiday food safety a priority

The Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services Division of Environmental Health (DEH) is reminding people to make food safety a priority this holiday season.

DEH, along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and California Department of Public Health, offer simple tips to help keep you and your friends and family in good health, and free from foodborne illness.

"Food is a central part of many of our holiday celebrations," said DEH Director Melissa Martel. "It's important to follow safe food handling practices while preparing food for these gatherings."

Refrigerate or freeze turkey and other meat and seafood promptly after purchase. Refrigeration temperature should be kept at 41 F or colder. Keep hands and food contact surfaces clean. Frozen turkeys and other meat should be thawed in the refrigerator, in a sink with cool water that is changed every 30 minutes, or in the microwave. Never thaw poultry by having it sit on the counter.

Always wash your hands with warm, soapy water before and after handling food. Thoroughly clean all work surfaces, utensils and dishes with hot, soapy water and rinse with hot water before and after each use. And, keep sick people from participating in the food preparation process.

Wash fruit and vegetables under cool, running water. Even if you plan to peel them, it's important to wash them first because bacteria can spread from the outside to the inside as you cut or peel.

Keep fruits and vegetables away from raw meat, poultry, eggs and seafood. Also, keep raw animal products separate from each other. When taste-testing food, ladle a small amount of it into a dish and taste with a clean spoon.

Cook food to proper temperatures. Set the oven temperature no lower than 325 F, and be sure turkey is completely thawed before cooking. Using a food

thermometer, make sure that the internal temperature of turkey is at least 165 F at the thickest part. Cooking times will vary. For optimal safety, cook stuffing outside turkey in a casserole dish.

Turkey and other perishable foods should be refrigerated within two hours after being cooked. Do not eat leftover meat that has been refrigerated for longer than three-to-four days or leftover stuffing or gravy that has been refrigerated for longer than two days.

For more information about food safety, call the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Safe Food Information Line at 888-723-3366 or the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Meat and Poultry Hotline at 888-674-6854. Holiday food safety tips are also available at www.foodsafety.gov.

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