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news release

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Food safety helps keep holidays healthy

The holiday season is upon us, and that likely means sharing food with friends and family. The Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services Division of Environmental Health (DEH) is reminding people of safe food handling tips to keep holiday meals healthy.

Supervising Environmental Health Specialist Amanda Ruddy said, "DEH wants everyone to have a healthy holiday season and proper food handling goes a long way in preventing easily avoidable illnesses."

DEH along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend following four simple steps to lessen the chance of foodborne illness: Clean, separate, cook and chill.

Clean your hands with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food. Thoroughly wash all surfaces, utensils and dishes with hot, soapy water and rinse with hot water before and after each use. Wash fruits and vegetables under cool, running water even if you plan to peel them to prevent the spread of bacteria.

Separate raw and cooked foods to avoid cross contamination. Keep fruits and vegetables away from raw meat, poultry, eggs and seafood. Also, keep raw animal products separate from each other. 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. Use a clean spoon to taste food as it's cooked or ladle a small amount into another dish.

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.

Chill turkey and other perishable foods in the refrigerator within two hours of 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 Food and Drug Administration Safe Food Information Line at 888-723-3366 or the U.S. Department of Agriculture Meat and Poultry Hotline at 888-674-6854. Holiday food safety tips are also available at www.foodsafety.gov.

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