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### **Local Health Departments provide tips for Safe Holiday Food Preparation**

Local Health Departments across Northern Michigan are teaming up with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide tips and resources for safe food preparation during the Thanksgiving holiday. With the number of things that can go wrong in the home kitchen, steering clear of food safety blunders can be challenging. A few simple steps can ensure your family and guests get a delicious home cooked meal, and not holiday food poisoning.

“Thanksgiving dinner is one of the largest meals we prepare each year,” said Mr. Daniel Thorell, Environmental Health Director for Grand Traverse County Health Department. “Cutting corners can put your family and guests at risk for foodborne illness, by forgetting a few basic food safety principles, such as washing your hands after handling the raw turkey and using a food thermometer to be sure its cooked to 165 degrees.”

Food poisoning is a serious public health threat. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that millions of people suffer from foodborne illness each year, resulting in roughly 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths. Recent USDA research found that in 3 Americans may have someone at high risk for foodborne illness in their home.

“Most foodborne illnesses can be avoided if you follow a few simple guidelines” says Mr. Thorell. “These can keep your family and guests safe this holiday season.”

#### **20 seconds of hand washing**

The CDC recommends washing your hands with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds. Handwashing is especially important when handling raw meats. Unfortunately, in a recent USDA study, participants failed to wash their hands sufficiently a shocking 97 percent of the time. Without proper handwashing, a well-intentioned home cook could quickly spread bacteria around the kitchen.

Do not forget to wash your hands before and after seasoning your bird too. Almost half the study participants contaminated their spice containers when seasoning poultry. If you’ve held raw turkey, make sure to wash your hands completely before seasoning, and if you rub around those spices on the bird by hand, make sure to wash your hands completely afterwards.

## **Say no to ‘bird baths’**

Do not rinse or wash your turkey. Doing so can spread bacteria around the kitchen, contaminating countertops, towels and other food. Washing poultry doesn’t remove bacteria from the bird. Only cooking the turkey to the correct internal temperature will ensure all bacteria are killed.

## **Take an accurate temperature inside, cook the stuffing outside the turkey**

Don’t rely on those pop-up thermometers to determine if your turkey is safe! Take the bird’s temperature with a food thermometer in three areas — the thickest part of the breast, the innermost part of the wing and the innermost part of the thigh — and make sure all three locations reach 165°F. If one of those locations does not register at 165°F, then continue cooking until all three locations reach the correct internal temperature. In recent USDA research, 88 percent of participants did not cook their poultry to the safe internal cooking temperature of 165°F.

When stuffing is cooked inside the turkey’s cavity, it must be checked with a food thermometer and reach 165°F as well. The density of stuffing can mean that while the turkey’s breast, wing and thigh have registered 165°F, the stuffing temperature can lag behind. Undercooked stuffing is a common cause of holiday food poisoning. Turkeys are tricky enough, so it’s easier to keep things simple and cook the stuffing outside the bird.

## **Use the two-hour rule to avoid foodborne illness**

Everyone loves to graze during Thanksgiving, but when perishable food sits at room temperature, it is sitting in a temperature range where bacteria love to multiply. This range, between 40-140°F, is known as the ‘danger zone.’ If foods have been left out at room temperature for more than two hours they should be discarded.

## **Call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline**

If you have questions, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) to talk to a food safety expert from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday, in English and Spanish. If you need help on Thanksgiving Day, the Meat and Poultry Hotline is available from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Eastern Time. You can also chat live at [AskKaren.gov](https://www.AskKaren.gov) during the hotline’s hours of operation.

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