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CONTACT: Maryanne Aldrich

(603) 747-9189

PREPARE YOUR HOLIDAY FEAST SAFELY

The holidays are fast approaching and along with family gatherings and celebrations, comes a tremendous amount of high-calorie meals and holiday goodies. It's a wonderful time of celebration that showers us with bountiful main dishes and varieties of home-made pies and desserts. To avoid holiday weight gain, remember to keep your portions in check and eat slowly by savoring your food. This will help to prevent overeating and signals your stomach that it is full. Most importantly, stay healthy by making sure your holiday dinner is prepared and handled properly.

According to the The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 76 million illnesses were caused last year by mishandled food. "Food-borne illness can spread at this time of year due to undercooked poultry and improper sanitation," according to Richard L. Vogt, MD, Executive Director of Tri-County Health Department. When it comes to food temperatures and storage, Vogt adds some easy-to-remember advice. "Keep it hot, keep it cold, or do not keep it at all." He also offers the following suggestions:

- Defrost frozen turkeys in the refrigerator, not at room temperature, since bacteria can grow. Thaw 24 hours for each five pounds of weight. A ten-pounder takes two days, a 20-pounder takes four days. Even after it fully defrosts, an uncooked turkey is still safe in a cold refrigerator (35-40°F) for two or three days.
- Cook poultry to an internal temperature of 165°F, measured with a meat thermometer inserted deep into the breast meat.
- Cook and serve the stuffing in a separate pan. Stuffing placed in the cavity of the bird may not cook to a high enough temperature to kill bacteria absorbed from the turkey juices.
- Insist that everyone washes hands thoroughly with warm, soapy water before preparing any food, after handling any uncooked meat and again before eating.
- Clean and sanitize knives, cutting boards, counter tops and platters after exposure to raw meat in order to prevent cross-contamination onto any ready-to-eat foods.
- Do not leave food out at room temperature for more than two hours after serving.
- Carve the meat from the bones, store meat and stuffing separately in shallow containers, and freeze leftovers or use them within four days. Reheat leftovers to 165°F before serving.

Enjoy this special time of celebration with family and friends. Be thankful for your blessings and remember, you deserve a good holiday meal...*Bon Appetit!*