ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
IDPH
PROTECTING HEALTH, IMPROVING LIVES

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 24, 2025

CONTACT:
James.Leach@illinois.gov

IDPH Issues Thanksgiving Week Reminder to Guard Against Foodborne Illness

Safe and proper preparation and handling of food can prevent illness at the holidays

SPRINGFIELD – As people across Illinois make preparations for holiday meals, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is reminding everyone to follow food safety and hygiene recommendations to prevent an outbreak of foodborne illness.

"Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays filled with family, friends, football, and of course great food" said IDPH Director Sameer Vohra. "As we kick off the holiday season, I want to remind everybody, and especially those preparing meals, that we can prevent foodborne illnesses by following proven food safety tips."Dir. Vohra notes the importance of following basic food safety guidelines, including keeping hot foods hot, cold foods cold, and properly thawing frozen turkeys in the refrigerator before roasting them. It's important to make sure that turkeys and stuffing are cooked to a safe internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

For safe turkey preparation, the first step is to safely thaw the bird. When turkey begins to thaw, any germs or bacteria that may have been present before freezing can begin to grow again. This is why food safety experts recommend thawing turkeys in the refrigerator. It takes about 24 hours for every five pounds of turkey to thaw in the refrigerator, so it can take three days to thaw a 15-pound bird. If you don't have time to use the refrigerator, you can use a sink of cold water (change water every 30 minutes), or a microwave. Never thaw your turkey by leaving it out on the counter.

In general, there are four key areas to remember for safe meal preparation:

Clean

Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water before, during, and after preparing your food, especially before and after handling turkey, and before eating. Wash cutting boards, utensils, dishes, and countertops with hot soapy water after preparing raw turkey and before you prepare the next item.

Separate

Raw turkey and its juice can contaminate anything they touch. Keep the turkey and its juices separate from foods that won't be cooked and fully clean and sanitize surfaces that come into contact with turkey and its juices to prevent harmful germs from spreading to other food or your family and friends. Use one cutting board

or plate for raw meat, poultry, and seafood and a separate cutting board or plate for produce, bread, and other foods that won't be cooked.

Cook

Use a food thermometer to check if the turkey and stuffing have reached a safe internal temperature of 165° F. Take the temperature in three places – the thickest part of the breast, the innermost part of the thigh, and the innermost part of the wing. For stuffing, make sure the stuffing's center reaches 165°F.

Chill

For leftovers to be safe to keep, they must be refrigerated within two hours of serving or have been kept hot at or above 140°F or cold below 40°F. Discard any foods that sat out for more than two hours at room temperature. After eating, divide the remaining food into small containers and refrigerate or freeze it. Leftovers are safe in the fridge for up to four days. Reheat all leftovers to at least 165°F before serving or eating.

An easy rule to remember is to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. And avoid food handling mistakes like thawing food on the counter or peeling fruits without washing them first.

Typical symptoms of foodborne illness include vomiting, diarrhea, stomach cramps, fever, and nausea, which can start anywhere from hours to days after consuming contaminated food or drinks. Symptoms can last from a few hours to a few days. It is important to stay hydrated when you have diarrhea and vomiting. Those at risk of severe or life-threatening foodborne illness include older adults, infants, young children, pregnant individuals, and people with weakened immune systems. If you become severely ill, or if you are at risk for more severe disease, seek care from a medical provider to ensure a proper diagnosis and appropriate illness management.

More information on Food Safety During the Holidays can be found on the IDPH website.

###