

FOOD SAFETY FACTS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

1. At what temperature should I be storing food?

It is always important to keep foods out of the danger zone, which is between 4°C (40°F) and 60°C (140°F) to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria. To do this, just keep hot foods hot at least 60°C (140°F) and keep cold foods cold at 4°C (40°F) or lower.

2. What are some tips on preparing and serving holiday buffets?

Remember the “2-hour rule” especially when entertaining with a large meal or buffet. Don’t let perishable foods linger for longer than two hours in the danger zone.

Keep replacement dishes or food hot: e.g. in the oven or a pot or cold; e.g. in the refrigerator or a cooler during the buffet.

Do not add new food to a serving dish that has been sitting at room temperature for more than two hours. Remember to change serving utensils as well.

Provide serving spoons and tongs for every dish served. Even finger foods, such as cut vegetables, candies, chips/nachos and nuts, should have serving implements to prevent contamination between guests.

3. What do I have to watch out for when traveling with food?

Wrap hot food in foil and heavy towels, or carry in insulated containers to maintain a temperature of at least 60°C (140°F). Also, store cold foods in a cooler with ice or freezer packs to maintain the temperature at 4°C (40°F) or below. Full coolers keep their temperature better than partially full ones, so add extra insulation to take up unoccupied space. This will also prevent containers from sliding, falling over and leaking.

4. I heard that vegetables, herbs and other foods stored in oil can cause harmful toxins that cause serious illness when stored inappropriately. Is that true?

Yes. Home-prepared products such as basil or other herbs in oil; garlic, mushrooms, sun dried tomatoes, peppers in oil and also pesto or antipasto can be made safe only by adding dehydrated ingredients to oil. These products can be kept at room temperature without spoiling.

If home-prepared products in oil are made using *fresh* or *frozen* ingredients, e.g. Fresh basil, peppers, mushrooms or garlic, they should be kept refrigerated at all times and must be discarded after one week unless properly acidified. These products may be safely frozen for longer storage. Thaw frozen products in the refrigerator. After the products have thawed, they should be kept refrigerated at all times and must be discarded after one week unless refrozen.

Consumers who purchased products made with fresh ingredients from fairs or farmer’s markets or receive them as gifts should check that they were constantly refrigerated after they

were prepared, and when they were prepared. Discard them if they are more than one week old.

Commercially-prepared products in oil that contain an acid (such as vinegar) or salt in their list of ingredients are generally considered to be safe. Store them in the refrigerator after opening and between each use.

5. What are your suggestions on storing eggnog and other recipes with raw or lightly cooked eggs?

Be sure to handle and prepare these tasty treats safely. Commercial, ready-made eggnog is prepared using pasteurized eggs and does not require heating. Homemade eggnog may contain harmful bacteria if not prepared properly. Also, precautions should be taken with sauces, mousses, and any other recipes calling for raw or lightly-cooked eggs. Use pasteurized egg products, or bring egg-mixtures to a uniform temperature of 71°C (160°F) – 74°C (165°F) if using a microwave oven.

6. What about the cider?

Popular holiday beverages, such as un-pasteurized apple cider and other drinks made from un-pasteurized apple cider may pose a safety risk since they may contain harmful bacteria. Serve pasteurized ciders or bring un-pasteurized cider to a rolling boil before serving. This is especially important when serving cider to children, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems.

7. What should I do with the leftovers after a large meal?

While it is tempting to leave turkey and other foods at room temperature for snacking after a meal, you should refrigerate all leftovers promptly in uncovered, shallow containers so they cool quickly. Refrigerate once steaming stops and leave the lid or wrap loosely until the food is cooled to refrigeration temperature. Avoid overstocking the refrigerator to allow cool air to circulate freely. Store turkey meat separately from stuffing and gravy.

For more information on food safety, visit the CFIA website at www.inspection.gc.ca
You can also find food safety information on the Healthy Canada and Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education websites respectively at www.hc-sc.gc.ca and www.canflightbac.org

Source: Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) website

To speak to a health professional, contact your family doctor or speak to a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling: Calgary Health Link at 403-943-LINK (5465) or toll free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465). Mandarin Health Link 403-943-1554, Cantonese Health Link 403-943-1556.