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Holiday Food Safety Tips

Pueblo, Colorado – As we enter the busy holiday season, the Pueblo City-County Health Department is promoting food safety practices by encouraging residents to follow some simple tips to avoid foodborne illnesses this holiday season.

"Don't let foodborne illness ruin your holiday activities by not taking proper precautions against foodborne disease," said Sylvia Proud Public Health Director of the Pueblo City-County Health Department.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are 31 pathogens known to cause foodborne illness. Every year there are an estimated 48 million cases of illness, 128,000 hospitalizations, and 3,000 deaths in the United States due to foodborne diseases. Symptoms can vary depending on the illness, but some common symptoms are diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and nausea.

"Sometimes at large family gatherings our attention may not be focused as closely on safe food handling and this can present an opportunity for bacteria to be introduced," explained Vicki Carlton, program manager in the Environmental Health and Emergency Preparedness Division. Carlton added "There are simple safe food tips that can be used to ensure food safety this holiday season. These are best remembered by four simple words: **Cook, Clean, Separate, and Chill.**

Cook: Make sure all meats are thoroughly cooked by using a food thermometer: poultry and all stuffed foods (poultry, meats, fish, and pasta) to an internal temperature of 165°F; ground beef to an internal temperature of 155°F; and pork, fish, lamb, and all other meats to an internal temperature of 145°F. When reheating, leftovers should be thoroughly heated to 165°F.

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Clean: Always wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before and after handling any food. Use a disposable paper towel to dry hands. Wash hands and surfaces often during, between, and after all food preparation.

Separate: Use a separate cutting board for cooked foods, raw poultry, fish, and meats and for all raw vegetables or other ready-to-eat foods. Always wash the cutting boards after use. Do not cut raw vegetables on the same cutting board as raw meat to avoid cross contamination. Wash any utensil after preparing one food item before going on to the next item.

Chill: Refrigerate or freeze leftovers within two hours. The refrigerator should be maintained at 41°F or lower and the freezer should be at 0°F or lower. Keep hot foods hot, 135°F or hotter, and cold foods cold, 41°F or below. Never defrost food at room temperature. Thaw food in the refrigerator (plan a few days ahead), in a cold-water bath with cold running water, or in the microwave. When using a microwave, meat must be cooked immediately after thawing. Marinate foods in the refrigerator.

For additional information visit TheDishPueblo.com or call the Pueblo City-County Health Department at (719) 583-4307.

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