

Food safety can prevent illness

Salmonella and other harmful bacteria can be avoided if food is handled properly

By Kari Thorene
Higher Education Reporter

Mmm, Thanksgiving turkey.
Mmm, salmonella.
Risks run high for food-borne illnesses in family kitchens over the holidays.

"At least 30 pathogens are commonly associated with food-borne illness," according to the Partnership for Food Safety Education, a government group created in 1996 in response to nationwide concerns over food-borne illnesses. Symptoms often include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramps, fever, rashes and abdominal pain.

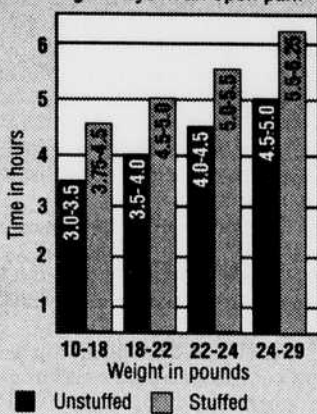
The good news is that most food-borne illnesses are preventable.

"The vast majority (85 percent to 95 percent) of reported cases of food-borne illness are caused by food handling errors in the home or by the food handling errors of workers in a restaurant or commercial kitchen," according to the Food Safety Home page.

The reason most food-borne illnesses are caused in the kitchen is because proper care is often not taken to cook dangerous microorganisms out of the food. A U.S. Department of Agriculture report on ground turkey found 31.5 percent had salmonella contamination and nearly half had some kind of microorganism.

Safe cooking times

The Butterball Turkey Company suggests the following times for roasting turkeys in an open pan:



SOURCE: The Butterball Turkey Company

CARA STRAZZO/Emerald

Granted, ground turkey isn't the same as the whole bird, but you never can tell.

The Partnership for Food Safety Education is "Fight BAC! Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill." Each word represents one way to dramatically decrease risk of food contamination.

Cleaning refers to making sure surfaces and utensils are cleaned before and in between uses. This stops contamination from countertops and decreases the chance of contaminating vegetables with pathogens from meat.

Following good food-handling techniques can decrease risk of other contamination. Cross contamination of food can happen

when a cutting board is used to cut raw meat and other foods, such as vegetables, that won't be cooked. The bacteria transfers onto the board from the meat and later contaminates the vegetables.

Using a plastic cutting board instead of a wood board can reduce the risk of contamination because the pores and cuts in the wood surface can trap bacteria, according to the Food Safety Web site.

The same risk applies to knives, plates and other utensils that have come in contact with raw meat.

One of the best ways to prevent food-borne illness is to properly cook meat — to cook it at a high enough temperature for a long enough period of time to kill potentially dangerous microorganisms. The suggested temperature for cooking food is at least 160 degrees Fahrenheit. However, because Thanksgiving turkeys are much larger cuts of meat, the suggested temperature is 325 degrees.

"The bottom line is that raw meats on the supermarket shelves are contaminated with harmful bacteria," according to the Food Safety Web site, and it is important to cook the meat until the bacteria dies.

Properly refrigerating meats ensures bacteria and viruses can't grow in the downtime between meals.

Other suggestions include thawing meat before cooking it and storing juices in sealable plastic or glass containers.

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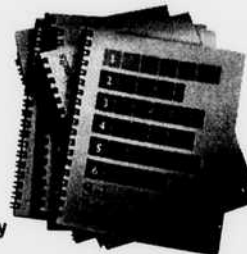
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HAPPY THANKSGIVING

The EMU Administration would like to wish students, faculty and staff a safe and happy Thanksgiving weekend.

EMU CRAFT CENTER

Winter Workshop Schedules are here

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