

FOOD SAFETY
BY: Melissa Jeremiah, RN
Director of Hoosier Uplands Home Health and Hospice

Think of Easter and I know that dinner with family, Easter rabbits, jellybeans and Easter egg hunts come to mind, but food safety should be right up there at the top of your list as well. According to Home Food Safety, "Millions are sickened, 325,000 are hospitalized and 5,000 die each year from food poisoning." The people at increased risk of foodborne illnesses include: pregnant women and newborns, older adults and people with weakened immune systems and chronic illnesses such as diabetes, kidney disease, AIDS and some forms of cancer. Hopefully, after reading these tips everyone will have safer family gatherings.

Food Safety Tips:

- #1- Wash your hands often when preparing a meal, for 20 seconds at a time. According to Home Food Safety, "Nearly ½ of all cases of foodborne illnesses could be eliminated if people would wash their hands more often when preparing food." Remember to wash hands between tasks, such as handling raw meats then cutting fresh vegetables.**
- #2- Always use 2 cutting boards. 1 for raw meats and 1 for fruits and vegetables. Color code them to identify what purpose each is for. For example place a red dot on the raw meat one and a green dot on the fruit and vegetable one.**
- #3- Never allow foods to defrost at room temperature or by placing them in warm water in your sink. Defrost food using the microwave or the refrigerator.**
- #4- Use separate spoons to taste, stir and serve foods.**
- #5- Use a meat thermometer, as it is the only fool-proof way to tell if meat is done. The following temperatures should be observed for the following foods:
140 degrees fahrenheit: fully cooked ham to reheat.
160 degrees: hamburger, steaks, roasts, pork, fresh ham and egg dishes/casseroles.
165 degrees: ground chicken, ground turkey, stuffing and reheated leftovers.
170 degrees: boneless turkey roasts and white meat poultry.
180 degrees: duck, goose, whole chicken, whole turkey and dark meat poultry.**
- #6- Avoid eating foods, when baking, that contain raw eggs, such as cookie dough and cake batter.**
- #7- Do not allow food to sit out more than 2 hours. Never allow food to cool to room temperature, before refrigerating.**
- #8- Use a refrigerator thermometer and make sure your refrigerator remains below 40 degrees fahrenheit.**
- #9- Store leftovers in shallow containers, not more than 2 inches deep.**
- #10- My favorite tip regarding leftovers is, "When in doubt, throw it out!" But, you can also use the following as guidelines on how long to keep leftovers:
1 - 2 days: stuffing, cooked seafood, cooked patties and nuggets, gravy and broth.
3 - 4 days: cooked/sliced ham, prepackaged lunchmeats (once opened), cooked beef, pork, poultry, fish and meat casseroles, cooked fresh vegetables, cooked pasta, soups and stews.
5 days: deli counter meats.
1 week: cooked rice and hot dogs (once opened).**

For more information on food safety please refer to www.homefoodsafety.org, which is where I researched this article. For a free food safety brochure please call Home Food Safety at 1-800-366-1655.