For Immediate Release

Follow these food safety guidelines for healthier holiday meals

MORGANTOWN, WV (Nov. 25, 2019) — As the holiday season approaches, Monongalia County Health Department’s Environmental Health program wants to help assure a festive and healthy holiday atmosphere by offering simple food preparation tips.

Wash hands properly — Hand washing is one of the most important control measures to protect both the preparer and the food. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water for 15 to 20 seconds after:

- Visiting the restroom, coughing, sneezing, eating, drinking, touching bare human body parts or using a tissue or tobacco.
- Handling soiled dishes or utensils, emptying the garbage, caring for animals or engaging in any activity that may contaminate hands.
- Before and after preparing any type of food, especially when switching between raw and ready-to-eat food.

Thaw your turkey properly — Do not thaw a turkey, or any food item, on the counter. Room temperature thawing provides the perfect environment for bacteria to multiply rapidly. Food safety experts recommend thawing foods:

- In the refrigerator, allowing 24 hours for every 5 pounds of turkey.
- Completely submerging small portions of food under running water that is cooler than 71 degrees Fahrenheit.
- In the microwave oven, immediately followed by cooking, for small quantities of food.
- As part of the cooking process for previously cooked food or for commercially processed items.
Prevent cross-contamination

- Keep raw meat, poultry or seafood separate from each other and away from other foods. Store on the lowest shelf to keep juices from dripping onto other foods.
- When barbecuing or cooking raw animal food, use a different plate and utensils for cooked food than the one that held the raw food.
- Clean with hot, soapy water and then disinfect cutting boards, utensils and kitchen surfaces after preparing raw meat, poultry, seafood or other foods. Use separate cutting boards and utensils for raw animal food as an additional safeguard.
- Prepare a solution of 1 teaspoon commercial bleach to 1 gallon of warm water to disinfect surfaces.

Cook foods thoroughly

- Meat and poultry should be cooked all the way through until juices run clear. Cook thawed turkey at 325 degrees for 15 minutes per pound.
- Cook stuffed or unstuffed turkey to an internal temperature of 180 degrees and separately cook homemade stuffing to 165 degrees. Do not put warm stuffing into a cold turkey. Warm stuffing could cause bacteria inside of turkey to reproduce. Cool stuffing first, then place into the turkey prior to cooking.
- Do not taste or eat raw, rare or pink ground meat or poultry in any form. When eating out, order ground meats and poultry thoroughly cooked.
- Cook seafood until it is opaque and flaky. Avoid raw shellfish, such as oysters or clams, even if marinated.
- Cook eggs thoroughly to be firm and not runny, or substitute with pasteurized eggs.
- Avoid eating other foods that contain raw or undercooked eggs, such as homemade Caesar salad dressing or cookie dough.

Store food properly

- Refrigerate or freeze perishable foods right away after returning from the store.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold after they are prepared.
- Refrigerate or freeze leftovers promptly in shallow containers. Do not leave food out at room temperature for longer than two hours. Remember, most bacteria double every 20 minutes at room temperature.
- Use the “first in, first out” method by serving foods prepared earliest food.
- And, remember, “When in doubt, throw it out.”
For more information, go to this link on the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s website: cdc.gov/foodsafety/communication/holiday-turkey.html. Or go to cdc.gov and search “food safety” to bring up a variety of food safety articles.

Check out monchod.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD and on Instagram at #wvmchd for up-to-date information on health and wellness in the community.

—30—