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DOH ISSUES FOOD SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR THE HOLIDAYS

TALLAHASSEE – As this year’s holiday season kicks into high gear, Florida Department of Health (DOH) officials remind Florida residents and visitors to put food safety at the top of their priority list.

“Though these are festive times with family and friends, we can’t forget precautions to help ensure celebrations are both joyous and safe,” Florida Department of Health Secretary John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A., M.P.H., said. “Holiday feasting should center around the four, basic food safety steps -- clean, cook, chill and separate.”

Agwunobi also advised, “When in doubt, throw it out.”

He recommends the following guidelines for safe food handling:

- Wash your hands before preparing or eating food, after using the bathroom or changing a diaper, after handling uncooked food, after playing with a pet, after handling garbage, after tending to someone who is sick or injured, after blowing your nose, and after coughing or sneezing
- When defrosting frozen foods, it is best to thaw the food in the refrigerator where it will remain at a safe, constant temperature of 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below. If that is not possible, food can be defrosted in the microwave, or by running cold water over the food item
- When preparing foods, follow the appropriate temperature guidelines for defrosting, cooking and cooling
- Store leftovers within two hours of cooking

People who have liver disease, diabetes, hemochromatosis, gastric surgery or who are immune compromised should avoid eating raw oysters or other raw animal protein during the holidays. They can eat oysters that are thoroughly cooked or than have been post-harvest treated.

For additional food safety information, call the toll-free USDA/FSIS Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-674-6854. Food safety specialists (both English and Spanish speaking) are available from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. EST on weekdays year-round. The hotline is closed on federal government holidays, but will operate special Thanksgiving hours from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. EST.

For more information please visit:

www.foodsafety.gov/~fsg/holiday.html
www.fightbac.org/holiday_fact.cfm
www.eatturkey.com/consumer/main.html.

For poisoning emergencies, call the Poison Information Center; toll free 24 hours a day, at 1-800-222-1222 (Voice/TDD). The healthcare professionals at the Center will immediately respond to poison emergencies and answer poison-related questions about medications, household products and other potentially dangerous substances.

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