

The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System — Serving New Jersey Since 1983

NEWS RELEASE

Media Contacts:
800-222-1222 (800-962-1253 outside NJ)

Good Food Gone Bad Avoid “Poisoning” Your Holiday Guests at the Dinner Table

Steven Marcus, MD, Executive and Medical Director
Bruce Ruck, Pharm.D., Director, Drug Information and Professional Education
New Jersey Poison Information and Education System (NJPIES)

Available for Interviews

(Newark, NJ) — The countdown to the holiday feast(s) begins. The next few weeks will be filled with planning, shopping, preparing, and cooking. Part of the nostalgia of the holidays comes from the anticipation of eating delicious food prepared from family recipes passed down from generation to generation. Unfortunately there are dangers that lurk in the kitchen that our grandparents were not aware of back in the good ol’ days. Family chefs are strongly encouraged to brush up on today’s food safety practices before setting out to prepare their meals. Food poisoning can spoil the holidays just as easily as a burnt meal.

Quick facts about food poisoning:

- It is generally a mild illness that most commonly results from poor food handling practices.
- It usually occurs hours after eating contaminated food and can include nausea, fever, vomiting, stomach cramps and diarrhea.
- Once symptoms develop they may last from several hours to two or three days.
- It can be a serious issue for those in poor health, infants and children, the elderly, and pregnant women.

Practicing basic food safety precautions are the best ways to protect your family and friends from leaving your table with more than just full bellies. First and foremost, do not prepare food if you are feeling sick or have any type of respiratory illness or infection. This can put your guests at risk for becoming ill. Follow the recommendations below to ensure a successful holiday feast.

- Clean:
 - Wash hands with soap and warm running water for at least 20 seconds before preparing any foods and especially after handling raw meat, poultry, fish or eggs. You can estimate the proper time to wash by slowly singing the happy birthday song twice while you wash your hands.
 - Wash food-contact surfaces (cutting boards, dishes, utensils, countertops) with hot, soapy water after preparing each food item. Never reuse utensils without careful cleaning; this is a source of contamination.
 - Rinse fruits and vegetables thoroughly under cool running water and use a produce brush to remove surface dirt.
- Separate:
 - Keep foods that will not be cooked from coming into contact with raw eggs, meat, poultry, or seafood. The same goes for kitchen utensils – do not use any kitchen utensil that has touched raw eggs, meat, poultry, or seafood on foods that will not be cooked.
 - Store raw foods below cooked food in the refrigerator so that raw food cannot drip into cooked food and contaminate it.
 - Keep cutting boards separate. Use one board for raw meat, poultry, or seafood. Use another for board for raw fruits and vegetables.
 - Do not put cooked meats or other foods that are ready to eat on any unwashed plates that held any raw eggs, meat, poultry, seafood, or their juices.

- Cook:
 - Follow the cooking instructions on food packages.
 - Use a food thermometer to confirm that cooked foods (meat, poultry, and fish) have been properly cooked by reaching a safe internal temperature. Visit www.foodsafety.gov for proper temperatures of cooked foods.
 - Safely cooking a turkey - stick the food thermometer into the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. Its internal temperature must reach 165°F. If the turkey is stuffed, the temperature of the stuffing must reach 165°F.
 - When reheating sauces, soups, and gravies, be sure to bring it to a rolling boil.
 - Eggs can be contaminated with Salmonella. Cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm. Scrambled eggs should not be runny.
 - Use pasteurized shell eggs, liquid or frozen pasteurized egg products, or powdered egg whites when making eggnog or any recipe using raw eggs.
 - Don't eat uncooked cookie dough, which may contain raw eggs. It is unsafe!
- Chill:
 - Defrost/thaw frozen food safely in the refrigerator, under cold running water, or in the microwave—never at room temperature. Cook food thawed in cold water or in the microwave immediately.
 - Allow enough time to properly thaw food. For example, a 20-pound turkey needs four to five days to thaw completely in the refrigerator.
 - Check to make sure both refrigerators and freezers are set at proper temperatures. Refrigerators set at or below 40°F and freezers set at 0°F.
 - Refrigerate leftovers and takeout foods—and any type of food that should be refrigerated, including pie—within two hours.
 - Leftovers should be used within three to four days, unless frozen.
 - When in doubt, throw it out. Don't taste any food that looks or smells questionable.

"Be sure to keep these tips in mind as you cook and entertain family and friends this holiday season," said Bruce Ruck, Pharm.D., of the NJ Poison Center. "If you should run into a potential problem at any point during the cooking process, we are here to help. Do not take chances by waiting until symptoms appear or wasting valuable time looking up information on the Internet," said Ruck. If you have questions about food preparation/handling, foodborne illness, or any poison exposure it's good to know help is just a phone call away. Having a poison expert give you exact instructions for your specific situation can help significantly during those critical first few minutes. If someone is unconscious, not breathing, seizing/convulsing, bleeding profusely, difficult to arouse/wake up, etc. call 911 immediately, otherwise call the **NJ Poison Experts at 1-800-222-1222**.

Help is Just a Phone Call Away!

Program the Poison Help line (800-222-1222) into your cell phone and post it near your home and office phones too. Experts are always here to help 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year, even during bouts of Mother Nature like Hurricane Sandy. Calls are free and confidential and help is available in more than 150 languages. Contact us by either calling the hotline at 1-800-222-1222, chat via www.njpies.org, or text in at 8002221222@njpies.org.

We are social. Join us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/njpies) and Twitter ([@NJPoisonCenter](https://twitter.com/NJPoisonCenter)) for breaking news, safety tips, trivia questions, etc. Share what you learn with your family (including children), friends, and coworkers.

Real People. Real Answers.

About NJPIES

As New Jersey's only poison control center, the New Jersey Poison Information & Education System provides information on poison prevention and treatments. Chartered in 1983, NJPIES provides free consultation through telephone hot line services and the Web. Medical professionals such as physicians, registered nurses and pharmacists offer confidential advice regarding poison emergencies and provide information on poison prevention, drugs, food poisoning, animal bites and more. These specialists are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

NJPIES coordinates state poison education and research and is designated as the regional poison center by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It tracks incidences of

adverse reactions to food, drugs and vaccines in order to monitor potential public health issues and provide data to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A division of the Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health of the New Jersey Medical School of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. NJPIES has a state-of-the-art center located on the school's Newark campus. NJPIES is funded, in part, by the NJ Department of Health and the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

New Jersey residents seeking immediate information about treating poison emergencies, and those with any drug information questions, should call the toll-free hot line, **800-222-1222**, any time. The hearing impaired may call **973-926-8008**. For more information, visit www.njpies.org or call **973-972-9280**.

About Rutgers

Established in 1766, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is America's eighth oldest institution of higher learning and one of the nation's premier public research universities. Serving more than 65,000 students on campuses, centers, institutes and other locations throughout the state, Rutgers is the only public university in New Jersey that is a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities.

Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS) is the health care education, research, and clinical division of Rutgers University, comprising nine schools and their attendant faculty practices, centers, institutes and clinics; New Jersey's leading comprehensive cancer care center; and New Jersey's largest behavioral health care network.

###