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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.

"These festive times with family and friends should involve precautions to help ensure celebrations are both joyous and safe," said Florida Department of Health Secretary John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A. "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

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.

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