Be sure to follow food safety guidelines for holiday gatherings: a NetWellness column

By Plain Dealer guest columnist
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If you are hosting relatives or friends over the holidays, you'll want to be sure that you are following all food safety guidelines.

Food Safety.gov
A great place to start is FoodSafety.gov, a veritable one-stop shop of food safety information from the federal government. This site offers information from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Partnership for Food Safety Information. All these agencies provide similar basic information. If you don't find what you're looking for, click on another and chances are you'll find it.

Some areas on the site to be sure to check out include:

- Keep Food Safe
- The Basics: Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill
- For Specific Groups of People, where you will find information for pregnant women, older adults, and persons with chronic illnesses

The information for older adults, for example, includes everything from a brief overview from the FDA and a detailed, 24-page brochure (available as a PDF) from the USDA. Among the basic guidelines you'll find are to avoid serving seniors sprouts, raw fish, raw or lightly cooked eggs (including meringue and homemade egg nog), and unpasteurized juices.

Healthy for the Holidays
Specific holiday-related food safety information is offered under the category of By Events and Seasons. You can find details on:

- Thawing and cooking turkey
- Making sure homemade pies, eggnog and other holiday goodies are safe
- Keeping food safe in holiday buffets

Audio podcasts are also available in each area listed above.

Ask Your Own Questions
You can also ask experts specific questions by e-mail or by phone.
Ohio State University – OSU offers its own Food Safety Hotline. Since July 2009, thanks to a partnership between The Kroger Co. and the Center for Innovative Food Technology, the hotline has been staffed from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every weekday -- and that includes Thanksgiving Day. In Ohio, call toll-free at 1-800-752-2751, or anyone can e-mail a question to the hotline.

USDA – You may also contact the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline for answers in English or Spanish from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays by calling 1-888-674-6854.

Ask Karen – The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service offers the Ask Karen service. You can type in your food safety question and receive a list of questions and answers related to your inquiry.

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