

## Handling Spring Holiday Food Safety Guide

USDA and N.G.A. agree – The Spring holidays should be about enjoying family, religion and special meals, not about food safety. Print USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service holiday food safety guide (below) that you can post in the meat and holiday food isles in your store!

Food Safety and Inspection Service  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D.C. 20250-3700

News Release

Contact: **Susan Conley (202) 720-7943**  
**Elizabeth Gaston (202) 720-9113**

### Handle Food Safely For Easter and Passover

WASHINGTON, April 4, 2001 — "As Easter and Passover are observed with family meals, they should be remembered for their religious significance, rather than foodborne illness," said Susan Conley, director of Food Safety Education for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service. "So we are urging folks to handle and cook spring foods safely."

Using a food thermometer when preparing springtime meals is essential to safe cooking, which is one of the four steps in preventing foodborne illness. As part of the national "Fight BAC!™" campaign, the BAC messenger advises consumers always to cook thoroughly, clean hands and surfaces, separate raw and cooked foods, and chill leftovers promptly.

The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline offers the following food safety advice for foods typically served at these spring observances. For more information about safe handling and cooking of eggs, beef, lamb, turkey, chicken and ham, see the Agency's publications on the Internet at [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov).

**EGGS.** Hard-cooked eggs — a part of both Easter and Passover celebrations — should be cooked thoroughly. Refrigerate eggs within 2 hours of cooking and use them within a week. For the Passover Seder, keep the plate of eggs refrigerated until time to set them on the table.

**DYEING AND HUNTING EGGS.** To dye hard-cooked eggs, use a food-safe coloring and place them in the refrigerator within 2 hours. Hard-cooked eggs for an egg hunt must be prepared with care to prevent cracking the shells. If the shells crack, bacteria could contaminate the inside. Eggs should be hidden in places that are protected from dirt, pets, and other sources of bacteria. The total time for hiding and hunting eggs should not be longer than 2 hours. The "found" eggs must be re-refrigerated until eaten. If the Easter egg hunt will take longer than 2 hours, hide plastic eggs.

**BEEF** and **LAMB** are often served at spring dinners. If the meat will be marinated, it should remain in the refrigerator and can be kept there up to 5 days before cooking. Roasts, steaks, and chops should be cooked to at least 145 degrees F in an oven set no lower than 325 degrees F. Ground meats, on

**HAM.** Both vacuum-packaged fully cooked and canned hams can be eaten cold just as they come from their packaging. To reheat them, set the oven no lower than 325 degrees F and heat to an internal temperature of 140 degrees F. Cook-before-eating hams must be baked in an oven set no lower

the other hand, should be cooked to 160 degrees F.

than 325 degrees F and reach 160 degrees F to be safely cooked before serving. Hams can also be safely cooked in a microwave oven, other countertop appliances and on the stove top.

**TURKEY OR CHICKEN.** To defrost frozen poultry, place it in the refrigerator allowing one day for every 5 pounds. These birds can also be safely thawed by submerging the wrapped poultry in cold tap water, changing the water every 30 minutes. When roasting whole poultry, set the oven no lower than 325 degrees F and heat to an internal temperature of 180 degrees F in the thigh as measured with a food thermometer. If stuffing whole poultry, make the dressing immediately before inserting it loosely in the cavity. The stuffing must reach 165 degrees F before removing the bird from the oven.

**THE PASSOVER SEDER.** Serving the traditional Passover meal on the first night presents some food safety challenges as the entire meal must be prepared ahead so that everyone can participate in the Seder ceremony.

"Cold food can be arranged on platters ahead of time and served directly from the refrigerator," Conley explained. "The brisket, for example, can be thoroughly cooked ahead, sliced and refrigerated in a shallow pan. If the brisket will be served hot, it should be thoroughly reheated to 165 degrees F just before serving."

#### **HANDLING LEFTOVERS**

Conley cautioned that no perishable foods should stand at room temperature for more than 2 hours. "Place leftovers in shallow containers, refrigerate, and use or freeze within 3 to 4 days. Thoroughly reheat leftovers to 165 degrees F."

Specialists answer food safety questions at the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline. Call toll-free 1 (800) 535-4555; Washington D.C. area (202) 720-3333; for the hearing impaired 1 (800) 256-7072 (TDD/TTY). The Hotline's hours are Monday-Friday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Eastern Time, year-round. An extensive selection of timely food safety recordings are also available at these numbers 24 hours a day using a touch-tone phone.

**For Further Information, Contact:**  
FSIS Congressional and Public Affairs Staff  
Phone: (202) 720-9113 Fax: (202) 690-0460