

Food Safety Tips in Recipes Help Avoid Food Poisoning

By Linda F. Golodner, Chris Wiant, PhD, MPH, and Guest Author Edgar Chambers IV, PhD
December 13, 2019



In a nutshell...

A survey conducted by the Water Quality & Health Council found consumers fear getting sick from their holiday hosts' poor kitchen hygiene. Survey statistics confirm unsafe food practices, but also that most people follow recipes. Research shows when food safety tips are included in recipes, safe food handling improves.

Holidays and special meals go together. That said, no one wants a case of food poisoning over the holidays, or ever! We learned from our recent "[Plate It Safe](#)" survey that about one-third of Americans are concerned about getting sick because of someone else's poor kitchen hygiene. Based on our findings, that concern may be justified.

Our survey concluded that hand washing, essential to safe food preparation, is *incompletely practiced* by about one-quarter of the public. This group admits they wash their hands before and after preparing foods but not at critical times during preparation, such as after handling raw produce or meats. Additionally, 62% of the public rinse raw turkey in the kitchen sink, a process that can cause a pathogen-rich spray to contaminate foods and food contact surfaces up to three feet away. The survey also found of those who know that rinsing a raw turkey in water does not prevent the spread of disease, more than half say they do it anyway. Old habits die hard.



According to the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#), washing raw poultry is unnecessary and can spread pathogens to surfaces within a three foot radius. [Cooking poultry to 165 °F](#) is sufficient to destroy pathogens in poultry.

Who's Cooking the Holiday Meal?

A full 94% of survey respondents say they participate to some degree in cooking holiday meals. "Pot luck" is a popular style of holiday gatherings. In addition, guests often assist the host cook in the kitchen. Many hands make light work, but are those hands being washed appropriately? Can we be sure that everyone contributing to the feast is savvy about food safety?

Are Work Tops Being Sanitized?

It is encouraging news that more than three-quarters of survey respondents say they always sanitize work tops and cutting boards after handling raw meat or poultry. However, when sanitizing between cooking steps, most just use soap and water. Soap and water may physically remove some pathogens, but it does not kill or inactivate them broadly the way sanitizing does. In fact, in some cases, pathogens may be transported from one kitchen surface to another via a soapy sponge or cloth. Sanitizers, such as bleach wipes or a dilute solution of bleach, are needed to stop pathogens in their tracks through the kitchen and beyond.

How Much Bleach Should I Use?

Speaking of bleach, 82% of respondents either don't get their bleach mixing directions right or say they don't know how much regular bleach to add to a gallon of water to make a routine sanitizing solution for food contact surfaces. More than half overestimate the amount of bleach needed. Only 18% know that it takes *just one tablespoon of regular strength bleach (6% strength) added to one gallon of water* to yield an effective food contact surface sanitizer.¹ (For a smaller volume, mix one teaspoon of bleach in a quart of water.) It is not helpful to use more than that. Nevertheless, 58% of survey respondents say they would add as much as ¼ cup to one full cup of bleach to one gallon of water.

Adding Food Safety Tips to Recipes

Interestingly, 97% of respondents say they either always or sometimes follow a recipe. That response may help pave the way toward needed improvements in kitchen hygiene. A [2016 study](#) that one of us (E.C.) participated in found that introducing food safety instructions in recipes improved safe food handling. The study subjects even said recipes with such instructions were easy to use and that they would be likely to use them at home. That's great news, and it helps tremendously that the Partnership for Food Safety Education launched the [Safe Recipe Style Guide](#) to help recipe writers include basic food safety instructions in their recipes.

[Research shows](#) that when recipes contain food safety instructions, people follow them. Consider this: hand washing rises from 59% to 90% and thermometer use increases from 20% to 86% when recipes include safety instructions. We are all for these recipe reminders, if that's what it takes to increase safe cooking practices.

Stay safe and healthy this holiday season!

Linda F. Golodner is President Emeritus of the National Consumers League and Vice Chair of the Water Quality & Health Council. Chris Wiant, MPH, PhD, is president and CEO of the Caring for Colorado Foundation. He is also chair of the Water Quality & Health Council. Edgar Chambers IV, PhD, is a consumer behavior expert at Kansas State University.

www.waterandhealth.org

¹ Bleach should be mixed with water only. Fresh solutions should be made daily as bleach solutions degrade over time.