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There is nothing more likely to ruin your Christmas, than a nasty bout of food poisoning for you, your family or even one of your colleagues. This month the Food Standards Agency has reiterated their warning about checking the Food Hygiene Rating of anywhere you are planning to eat over the festive season. To do this, you can visit their website: <http://ratings.food.gov.uk/> or download the android or iphone app.

Having said that, the majority of us cook Christmas dinner at home, with more than one in ten cooking for more than ten people. So, there are our top tips for keeping the food at home safe:

1. Clean out the fridge and freezer before you start shopping. Make room by using up sauces and pickles, but watch out for use by dates!
2. Don't overstock your fridge and freezer, it makes it difficult for air to circulate and maintain the right temperature. Food should be stored in covered containers.
3. Wash your hands frequently especially before preparing or touching food.
4. Frozen turkeys or other meats should always be fully thawed before cooking. A 15lb turkey will take 24-48 to thaw completely in the fridge.
5. Talking of turkeys, there's no need to rinse it under the tap, splashes of water can transfer bacteria around the kitchen. Proper cooking will kill the bacteria anyway.
6. Don't use raw eggs in food that won't be cooked (chocolate mousse or mayonnaise) instead use pasteurised eggs.
7. Use separate chopping boards and utensils or wash them thoroughly to avoid cross contamination between cooked, raw and ready to eat food.
8. After the event, don't leave leftovers lying around. Make sure hot food is cooled quickly, before putting in the fridge. Smaller portions will cool faster.
9. Avoid reheating food more than once, and always make sure food is piping hot throughout. Don't keep leftovers for more than 2 days.
10. If you're still not sure, why not come along to one of our Food Safety Courses!

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Contact Us

Tel:

0151 420 5465

Email:

info@innovativesafety.co.uk

Post:

Innovative Safety Solutions
St Michael's House
Hale Road
Widnes
Cheshire
WA8 8XL

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Christmas Myths: BUSTED!

There are LOADS of Health and Safety Myths that rear their ugly head around this time of year, and we're here to put a stop to them.

1. Workers are banned from putting up Christmas decorations in the office.

It's just not true! Most organisations including Innovative Safety and the HSE put up Christmas decorations every year without a fuss. Just make sure your using something sensible (NOT a wheelie chair) to stand on, that everything (particularly fairy lights) are in good condition before hand, and that they're not left on overnight. Also double check nothing you put up will interfere with smoke / fire detection or intruder alarms.

2. Children are banned from throwing snowballs.

As long as they're wrapped up warm, playing somewhere safe and being sensible (NOT putting big stones inside them) where's the harm?!

3. You can't throw sweets at a pantomime.

Oh yes you can! This one comes from theatre insurers who are worried about the cost of being sued if someone gets injured, or something is broke. All the HSE say on the issue is check you have the right cover with your insurer.

Recycle Your Christmas Cards

Ok, I know we're not even having Christmas yet, but no one will want to think about this in January either. Each year the UK posts (not including those given out face to face) somewhere in the region of 750 million Christmas cards. All that paper can have a massive environmental impact.

BUT it is getting easier for us to do something about it. This year you will be able to recycle Christmas cards in Tesco, Sainsbury's, WH Smith and Marks & Spencer (in conjunction with the Woodland Trust) and probably many other places.

It can make a huge difference too. Since the Woodland Trust started its annual campaign, 14 years ago, they have received 15,000 tonnes of cards which has allowed them to plant more than 200,000 native trees all over the UK. Last year they received more than 8.3 million cards.

If all else fails, you can always recycle them yourselves, try snipping out the best bits and turning them into new Christmas cards for next year, or even gift tags.



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