Avoid food poisoning this Australia Day

Put another snag on the barbie, not a dose of food poisoning this Australia Day.

Public health physician Dr Andrew Langley said warm weather and catering for large get-togethers are two ingredients that can make Australia Day celebrations a risky period for food poisoning.

Dr Langley said preparing food for large numbers of people, overloaded fridges and the summer heat provided perfect conditions for food poisoning bugs to multiply, leading to food-borne illness.

He warned that food poisoning could be particularly serious for young children, the elderly, pregnant women and anyone in poor health.

“The crucial aspect for preparing Australia Day meals is planning ahead,” he said.

“Before cooking poultry, it should be completely defrosted, ideally in the fridge, and this can take several days.”

Dr Langley recommended using a temperature thermometer to ensure the thickest parts of the meat reach at least 75 ºC.

“Seafood is a common menu item for Australia Day celebrations, but in our warm climate extra care is required to keep these foods at the correct temperature,” he said.

If you’re planning on seafood for Australia Day, take prawns and other seafood home in an insulated bag or cooler and keep below 5ºC until ready to use by packing in ice or storing in your fridge.

Dr Langley also offered the following tips to help you stay healthy over the festive season:

- Avoid fridge overcrowding and keep the temperature at or below 5ºC. If there is not enough room, soft drinks, alcohol, pickles, jams and other condiments generally don’t need refrigeration to remain safe. Drinks can be kept cold in an esky with ice to avoid repeated openings of the refrigerator during the day.
- Make sure you cook poultry and minced meat products (including sausages and rissoles) right through – there should be no pink meat near the centre or bone and the juices should run clear to make sure any bacteria are killed.
- Keep raw meat, poultry and seafood from touching other food.
Use separate cutting boards and utensils for raw meat/poultry and ready-to-eat foods.

Prepare foods as close as possible to eating time.

Avoid leaving perishable nibbles out for too long. For example, put out small serves of dips and replace every couple of hours.

Refrigerate leftovers immediately after a meal and use within two to three days.

Before preparing foods and after handling raw meat or chicken, wash your hands thoroughly with running water and soap, and then dry properly.

Don’t prepare food if you have had vomiting or diarrhoea in the previous 48 hours.

Dr Langley said the symptoms of food-borne illness may include: diarrhoea; nausea; vomiting; abdominal cramps; fever; and headaches.

“A person suffering a food-borne illness may have one or more of these symptoms. Symptoms are often the same as for gastro-type illnesses caused by other sources, which can make it difficult to tell if the illness is caused by food or another source of illness.

“The time between eating the food and the appearance of the first symptoms may be as long as 3-4 days. This means that the last meal consumed may not necessarily be the culprit.

The duration of illness (time the symptoms last) may last for several days.

“It is important to note, foods that cause food-borne illness will not necessarily look, taste or smell any different to safe food and many people have mild symptoms and recover within a few days," Dr Langley said.

However, Dr Langley does warn that:

- if symptoms are very severe or last for more than 3 days or persist you should seek medical advice
- you should see a doctor immediately if your symptoms include blood or mucus in the diarrhoea
- people at risk of dehydration such as infants and the elderly should consult their local doctor as early as possible
- people with diarrhoea and vomiting should stay home from work or school and drink plenty of fluids.

For more information on food safety over the festive season, visit the website at http://bit.ly/15reX4S

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