



## **Celebrate safely during the holiday season**

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When you think of holiday gatherings, your thoughts probably center on Family, friends, home, food and drink. Whether your ideal vision involves Family gathered around a table feasting on delicious delicacies or good friends donning special holiday attire, parties that lack proper planning inadvertently welcome a dangerous guest to the holiday festivities—risk.

“We see too many stories during the holidays where celebrating turns sour because of bad decisions people make,” said Dr. Patricia LeDuc, U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center Human Factors Task Force director. “The happiness of Family gatherings can be offset by stress and other factors that might lead to arguments, accidents and sometimes a visit from law enforcement, turning a happy holiday time into a not-so-happy time.”

Mitigating risk at holiday parties means having a good plan and being a good host, according to officials at Mothers Against Drunk Driving. A responsible party host not only ensures all guests have a good time, but also works diligently to keep friends and Family safe.

MADD offers several tips to help plan safe holiday parties. Hosts should have low-alcohol and alcohol-free drinks available and serve plenty of food such as vegetables, cheese and dips so people don’t consume alcohol on empty stomachs. Activities like party games and door prize drawings are a great way to engage people and make for less active consumption of alcohol. Hosts also should identify designated drivers in the group and offer them fun “mocktails.” And before the first guest arrives, they should develop a plan to deal with those who drink too much and be prepared to take away keys, call and pay for taxis or welcome overnight guests.

While ensuring overly intoxicated guests don’t get behind the wheel of a car, hosts must also prevent these same guests from attempting to walk home alone. Each year, a significant percentage of pedestrians killed on American roads are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Party guests have important responsibilities when it comes to safe celebrating as well. Before heading to a party or hitting the club, ensure your group designates a driver. Alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages and never leave a drink unattended or accept a drink from a stranger. Once the festivities have ended, buckle up, make sure everyone else in the car is buckled in and drive cautiously, always alert for intoxicated drivers on the road.

While the presence of alcohol at holiday parties can lead to some very unfortunate situations, the appearance of improperly prepared foods can also result in unhappy experiences for both guests and hosts.

Treat holiday food with respect. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, food borne disease infections continue to be a serious health issue in the United States, causing an estimated 76 million people to become sick each year.

The most common food borne illnesses associated with meat, poultry and fish are *salmonella*, *campylobacter* and *E. coli*. Most people become sick by eating contaminated foods or beverages or by coming in contact with someone who has a food borne illness. Pregnant women, older adults, infants and young children and those with weakened immune systems are at higher risk for severe infections.

To mitigate the risk of food borne infections, the CDCP offers the following tips:

- Cook meat, poultry and eggs thoroughly. Using a thermometer to measure the internal temperature of meat is a good way to be sure it's cooked sufficiently to kill bacteria.
- Don't cross-contaminate one food with another. Avoid cross-contaminating foods by washing hands, utensils and cutting boards after they've been in contact with raw meat or poultry and before they touch another food. Transfer all cooked meats to clean platters.
- Wash produce. Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables in running tap water to remove visible dirt and grime, and remove and discard the outermost leaves of lettuce and cabbage. Because bacteria can grow on the cut surface of fruits and vegetables, be careful not to contaminate these foods while slicing them on a cutting board. Avoid leaving cut produce at room temperature for long periods of time.
- Don't be a source of food borne illness yourself. Wash your hands with soap and water before preparing food, and stay out of the kitchen if you've recently had a diarrheal illness. Changing a baby's diaper while preparing food is another bad idea that can easily spread illness.

Also, don't forget holiday meals usually mean lots of leftovers. Although you may not feel like doing much after a big meal, be sure to refrigerate or freeze leftovers within two hours of cooking. Separate leftovers into shallow containers. Turkey should be removed from the bone and stored separately from stuffing and gravy. Use leftovers within four days except stuffing and gravy, which should be used within two days. If that seems impossible, freeze the leftovers.

More information on safe celebrating and many other fall and winter safety topics is available online at <https://safety.army.mil> under the Fall/Winter Safety Campaign tab.