

Thanksgiving Kitchen Safety

In the midst of a pandemic, families across the nation are rethinking their traditional holiday get-togethers and family gatherings and coming up with ways to celebrate the holiday season with loved ones virtually. A large part of holiday celebrations consists of time spent in the kitchen, which can come with dangers of its own. Whether you are planning to host a small, intimate gathering or you are spending your holidays with friends and family virtually, the best way to celebrate the holiday season is safely.

“On Thanksgiving, you have the whole spread. You have something that’s hot and right out of the oven to something that was maybe made a day ago – premade and refrigerated. Those refrigerated items are the ones we get a little more concerned about,” explained Dr. Sunil Arora, emergency medicine, OSF HealthCare.

He continued, “If they have eggs in them, mayonnaise, cream-based, those are the ones that will spoil quicker. So keeping them refrigerated, keeping them away from heat, maybe even away from the window where the sun can come in and heat it up unintentionally.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), bacteria can multiply rapidly if left at room temperature or in the “Danger Zone” between 40°F and 140°F. The CDC recommends not leaving perishable food out for more than two hours. The most common symptoms of food poisoning are upset stomach, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and fever. Most cases of foodborne illness can be treated at home with plenty of fluids, easy digested food and rest.

In addition to steering clear from food poisoning, another kitchen mishap comes when knives and other sharp objects come into play.

“Injuries we see with cooking and kitchen are blenders, or even those hand blenders. Sometimes the food gets stuck in the blender and the instinct is to get whatever is stuck out. They forget to unplug the blender or turn it off and then when it gets unstuck, they get injured,” explained Dr. Arora.

Like foodborne illnesses, some lacerations can be easily treated if they are not too severe. However, Dr. Arora explains that the emergency department (ED) sees an uptick in kitchen and cooking mishaps around the holiday season.

“Ultimately there are accidents that happen – and cuts to the hands are the biggest ones. Most of them can be treated at home. If the bleeding stops, if you’re able to put a band aid on, that’s great. But if the bleeding doesn’t stop, if the cut seems really big, gaping open – those are reasons to come in when you might need some sutures or stitches put in,” Dr. Arora advised.

If you cut your hand at home and need to head to the ED, an updated tetanus shot can be given if needed in addition to sutures. If you think you may have food poisoning, the CDC recommends going to the ED if you are experiencing severe symptoms such as bloody stools, a fever over 102 degrees, frequent vomiting, and signs of dehydrations such as feeling dizzy.

Most importantly, Dr. Arora urges people not to skip the ED during the holiday season. While COVID-19 cases are on the rise, the ED should not be avoided when serious illness or injury occurs that needs medical attention.

“If you feel like you can’t manage it at home then come in to the emergency department. We have taken precautions to mitigate the spread of any infections in the department – all of the staff members are masked, patients are masked, family members are masked. Avoiding the ER when you need it is not the recommended route,” explains Dr. Arora.

If you or a loved one experiences a kitchen mishap during the holiday season that needs emergent attention, go to your nearest ED or call 911.