

‘Go cold turkey this Christmas,’ says pathologist

Leftovers eaten over the festive season may be tasty but they need to be treated with caution. That’s the message this Christmas from microbiologist Professor Bill Rawlinson.

Professor Rawlinson, a Fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, says the temptation to leave leftovers for later is strong but should be avoided unless they are carefully handled.

“No one wants to see food wasted but food that looks innocent can easily become a breeding place for dangerous viruses and bacteria if it is not handled and stored properly,” says Professor Rawlinson.

People who think they are doing the right thing by reheating meat or even vegetables could inadvertently be creating the potential for contamination that leads to severe illness.

“Australian food authorities and retailers have an enviable reputation for maintaining food standards but harmful bugs can grow in foods stored in your home unless you are careful. It is potentially dangerous to reheat meats such as chicken or turkey, or leave them resting at warm temperatures for too long. Bacteria can multiply rapidly, leading to potential food poisoning.

“Australians love their seafood at Christmas but seafood, particularly if uncooked, needs to be handled carefully. It should be refrigerated and not allowed to stand at room or outside temperatures for very long. It is no exaggeration to say that seafood is potentially lethal if allowed to fester.”

Professor Rawlinson says the informal nature of a festive meal can lead to the spread of bacteria.

“With lots of friends and families sharing food over Christmas and New Year, the potential for the spread of viruses and bacteria is high. There are many examples of outbreaks such as noroviruses causing diarrhoea and vomiting from foods as simple as lettuce and soup. Spread between people can also occur, so washing hands is as important as ever. The last thing a family needs is a dose of gastroenteritis when they are meant to be celebrating,” he says.

“There is plenty of advice available on the internet from trusted sources such as government health websites. [Pathologists](#) enjoy food as much as anyone else does; we just want everyone to do it safely this Christmas.”

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