



**HOLIDAY KILLERS** - Some people seem to think they cannot celebrate right unless they drink alcoholic beverages.

Such drinks, however, can turn a festive holiday into a tragic holiday. (Photo by George Poynton)

## Take care when cooking

Christmas is usually celebrated with much feasting in larger than usual groups of family and friends.

Not only do the cooks who prepare these gastronomic events have to think of the safe preparation of large cuts of meat, stuffed poultry and perhaps a variety of seafood dishes—delights that can cause distressing illness if improperly stored and cooked—but they must also adjust their everyday cooking habits to the safe handling and storage of larger than usual quantities of food.

There are four principal types of illness caused by eating contaminated foods, according to Thomas DeMelfi, of the state Health Department's Division of Epidemiology.

"They are staphylococcal food poisoning, clostridium perfringens food poisoning, salmonellosis and shigellosis. All are introduced into the food through a food handler who has: an infection; poor toilet habits; unclean utensils or preparation surfaces; or not cooked or reheated the food thoroughly," DeMelfi said.

"Although symptoms of these illnesses differ, their symptoms are gastrointestinal in nature, and may include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and cramps of varying degrees."

DeMelfi said that even though the organisms causing foodborne illness and their sources vary, the way to prevent them all is scrupulous cleanliness and adequate refrigeration and cooking.

For maximum protection against foodborne illness, DeMelfi recommends:

Washing hands before and after all food preparation. Use a brush to scrub under and around fingernails.

Use only clean, dry utensils to prepare food.

Rinse all meat, poultry and seafood under cold running water and pat dry with paper towels.

Prepare meats, poultry and seafood on a disposable surface, such as waxed paper or the original wrappings. If prepared directly on a cutting board or counter be sure the surface is clean before you start. And don't prepare any other food on that surface until it has been scrubbed with hot soapy water and rinsed.

Wash and rinse all utensils used in the preparation of the meats, poultry and seafood before using them to prepare other foods.

Exclude from food preparation, if possible, any person with an oozing or open skin or eye infection, a respiratory illness or gastrointestinal illness.

Encourage your family to wash their hands before eating.

Meat, seafood and especially poultry should be cooked thoroughly. When cooking or reheating these foods, internal temperatures should reach 145 degrees, to be sure all bacteria are killed.

When stuffing is to be included, do not insert in the meat or poultry until is ready to be put in the oven. For safest preparation, the meat or poultry and the stuffing should be prepared in one continuous operation just prior to cooking. After the meal the stuffing should be removed from the meat and poultry and all food should be refrigerated as quickly as possible at a temperature of 40 degrees or colder.

## Holiday drinking can be expensive

The time of year for frequent parties is fast approaching, and for those who will be giving parties as well as attending parties, it's a good idea to get your priorities set beforehand.

The host who serves a motorist too much alcohol might call them a friend, but with this kind of friend you don't need an enemy.

Just take a look at the penalties from a first-time drinking while intoxicated conviction:

1. Guilty of a misdemeanor of the 2nd degree.
2. To pay a fine of not less than \$300 and up to \$5,000.
3. Serve a minimum term of imprisonment of not less than 48 hours.

Considering the seriousness of a drunk-driving conviction today, as opposed to yesteryear, the Valley Automobile Club's "First a Friend—Then a Host" program grows in importance. It provides guidelines on how to give a successful party without overemphasizing the drinking aspect.

Many of the party goers only drink on festive occasions and many don't drink at all. Even among those who do, we must be aware that there are some who can't handle alcohol well, or some who may be taking prescription drugs which will magnify the effect of alcohol.

This is where the perfect host has an opportunity to prove their skill...and maybe save a life or two. No one wants to be the cause of another's death, but a mistaken idea about hospitality has led to many tragedies.

The good host makes sure their guests have something to nibble on while enjoying their glass of holiday cheer. Food helps slow down the passage of alcohol from the stomach into the blood stream—and from there, right to the brain.

The good host makes sure that no jokers get the chance to double the amount of alcohol in the drinks, and provides non-alcoholic beverages for those who prefer them.

It may not seem like good hospitality at first glance, but the good host does not have an inexhaustible supply of liquor. Remember that the first thing affected by alcohol is our sense of judgment. The person doing the drinking is the poorest judge of how well he's handling his drinks. If he's mixing his own drink, chances are each one will be stronger than the one before. If you're doing the mixing, you can always decrease the alcohol content, if you feel it is necessary.

It is far safer and more thoughtful to taper off on drinks at the end of the evening. At this time, food and hot coffee should be served. Black coffee will not sober anyone. Only time can do that.

This brings up an important point for guests to remember. A good rule to follow is, if you're going to be driving, have no more than one drink a hour.

The body can burn up nearly that much alcohol, so the average healthy person is fairly safe with a regular drink an hour, especially if food is also consumed.

If you're headed for a party and expect to be drinking, have something to eat first. The consumption of any alcoholic beverage will get you intoxicated, including beer. A bottle of beer and a

cocktail contain about the same amount of alcohol.

Remember that you don't have to be "falling down drunk" to be convicted of driving under the influence of intoxicants. The key term is "under the influence", and that starts somewhere after the first drink, if you have more than one a hour.

If you would like a few pamphlets, "The party is over", which explains how much alcohol you will have in your blood with each drink over a period of time. Contact or write to the Valley Automobile Club, P.O. Box AAA, Wilkes-Barre, Pa. 18703. They are a great conversation item for a party and they could prevent tragedy.

## Don't make mistakes!

With the approach of the holiday season, parents may be tempted to use this as an opportunity to teach their underage children how to drink responsibly. This is always a mistake, and may well end in tragedy, a state Health Department official said recently.

"Trying to teach minors to drink responsibly is like trying to teach a cat to fly. The dangers are great, and the results are minimal," according to Luceille Fleming, deputy health secretary for drug and alcohol programs.

"The fact is that children often learn from us that we do not intend to teach. Anyone who serves alcohol to minors at home may think he or she is teaching responsible drinking, but another lesson is really being taught. Namely, that it is okay to break the law at home. It is vital to remember that as far as minors are concerned, alcohol in any form whatsoever—beer, wine spritzers, party punches, whatever—is an illegal drug," she said.

"And once we teach them that it is acceptable to use one illegal drug at home, they will quickly and logically assume that it is acceptable to use other illegal drugs, such as marijuana, cocaine, or speed, as well."

Fleming also offered these tips for those planning to serve alcoholic beverages to their adult guests:

Measure the amount of liquor in each drink. "One drink" means a 12-ounce beer, or five ounces of wine, or 1½ ounces of hard liquor—each contains about the same amount of alcohol.

Close the bar early—at least an hour or two before the party breaks up. For guests who insist on "one for the road," make it coffee or a soft drink.

Never let a guest drive away from your party under the influence. Even though the trip may be "just down the street," ask someone to drive them home or call a cab. If these approaches don't work, call the police—you may save a life.

"A final point we want to stress is simply this—you don't have to drink to have a good time," Fleming said.

"And if you can't imagine a party or social occasion without alcohol—if you have to drink to have a good time—you may well be on the way to becoming dependent on alcohol, which is an early stage in the disease of alcoholism."