

Too Many Cooks in the Kitchen?

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DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON, the kitchen becomes the center of activity, filled with family and friends. Practicing kitchen and food safety is always important, but especially during the holidays when more people are involved in the process. Holiday tragedies can be avoided by following simple safety tips. Offering tips to help clients avoid loss and time in the emergency room is another value-added service of the professional insurance agent.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), cooking fires are the leading cause of home and related injuries. By far, the most home cooking fires occur on Thanksgiving. For example, in 2010, there were 1370 cooking fires, or nearly three times as many as on other days of the year. (www.nfpa.org)

Three of the most common kitchen-related injuries seen around the holidays are burns, food poisoning, and lacerations. Guests may be unfamiliar with appliances, and it may not always be easy to tell when an electric cooktop burner is on or if it is hot. Open gas flames can be especially hazardous. Small children should be kept away from the oven and stove. Deep frying is a popular method of cooking turkeys. To be safe, the turkey should be completely dry and thawed prior to putting it in the hot oil. If moisture comes in contact with the 350 degree oil, the oil can splatter and burn skin, or cause a fire. NFPA estimates that deep fryer fires cause 5 deaths, 60 injuries and \$15 million in property damage each year. The frying should be done outside, and should never be left unattended. There are also newer oil free fryers that are safer.

Raw meat must be handled carefully. Turkeys should be thawed in the refrigerator. When using a quick thaw method in cold water, the water should be changed

frequently to avoid a build up of bacteria. Cross contamination can be avoided by washing utensils and preparation surfaces after working with meat, or by using different cutting boards for meats and vegetables. Stuffing cooked outside the turkey is more likely to be thoroughly cooked. Food should be refrigerated as soon as possible after it is served. If foods such as dips and shrimp are left out for a period of time, they should be kept on ice.

Keep knives and other sharp objects away from the edge of counter or tables, and small fingers. Carving should be done by someone who is experienced. Holiday dinners usually mean fancy china and glassware that are easily breakable. Careful handling can help to avoid the heartbreak of destroying Grandma's prize crystal, as well as an emergency room visit.

Leaving cabinet doors and drawers open can lead to bumps and bruises. Additional appliances may be needed for the holiday preparations. Avoid dangling or stretching cords where they can be accidentally pulled or tripped over. Clean up spills promptly, and keep floors clear of children and toys to avoid slip and fall or tripping hazards, especially when carrying a platter full of food. When possible, young children should play outside or at least away from the kitchen area.

In addition to cooking and kitchen hazards, holidays mean increased travel.



It is estimated that 39,000,000 people travel on Thanksgiving, with approximately 90% driving to their destinations (www.statisticbrain.com). Thanksgiving is one of the deadliest days to drive, especially after eating and drinking all day. Another problem is that people are often traveling on unfamiliar roads.

Holiday memories should be happy, and not tragic. Helping clients avoid loss is another sign of the true insurance professional.

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