An estimated 1 in 6 (48 million) Americans get sick from foodborne illness each year, resulting in roughly 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Thanksgiving is a time to be especially careful, as Americans are preparing a dish (turkey) they do not cook on a regular basis and for larger numbers of people. With more than 46 million turkeys cooked this holiday, there’s no better time to encourage families to safely prepare their meal by following four simple steps: clean, separate, cook and chill.

The 2016 Food & Drug Administration Food Safety Survey found that more than half of Americans think it’s not common to get food poisoning at home because of the way food is prepared. The great news is that most Americans wash their hands when handling poultry or raw vegetables, but 68% of consumers wash poultry in the kitchen sink which is not recommended by the USDA.

USDA experts are helping to dispel many common myths surrounding the preparation and serving of the holiday turkey meal. Serious illness can result from several commonly-held “time-saving” practices such as: stuffing the turkey the night before; thawing the bird on the counter; and serving a turkey once it is golden brown and the juices run clear. These actions put family members at risk for food poisoning.

To learn more about food safety practices this Thanksgiving, please visit www.FoodSafety.gov or call the USDA’s Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854), open weekdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET and from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day. Families can also access “Ask Karen,” an online database of answers to specific questions related to preventing foodborne illnesses available 24/7.

USDA Food Safety Experts are available to share the top tips for families on how to safely prepare the Thanksgiving holiday turkey and prevent dangerous foodborne illness. They can discuss:

- How soon before Thanksgiving you can buy a fresh or frozen turkey
- The safest ways to thaw a frozen turkey
- Advice on cooking temperatures and times for fresh and frozen turkeys
- Whether you should wash your turkey before cooking
- Safety tips for leftovers
- Data from the 2016 FDA Food Safety Survey