

Advice For Preparing A Safe Thanksgiving Meal

As families gather for Thanksgiving, it is also especially important not to forget food safety basics when preparing the holiday meal, reminds Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman. “Whether the Thanksgiving meal centers around a turkey, ham, roast, or some other dish, I want Americans to make sure that foodborne illness is not an invited guest.”

“By following four basic food safety practices everyone can reduce the risk of foodborne illness,” advises Bessie Berry, director of USDA’s Meat and Poultry Hotline.

1. Keep hands and all food preparation surfaces clean
2. Don’t cross-contaminate foodborne bacteria from one food to another
3. Cook to proper temperatures
4. Refrigerate perishable foods quickly after eating.

USDA offers the following “turkey basics” to help reduce foodborne illness:

Storing the turkey...Avoid cross-contamination

Whether you purchase a fresh or frozen turkey is a matter of personal preference. Buy a fresh turkey no more than two days ahead of the big meal and make sure you have adequate storage space in the refrigerator. If a frozen turkey is the choice, you can safely defrost it in the refrigerator, allowing 24 hours for every 5 pounds. Check that the original bag is not broken, to prevent raw juices from coming in contact with other foods. Also, the turkey can be thawed in cold water. Change the water every 30 minutes until the turkey is thawed. Cook immediately. Never defrost on the kitchen counter.

Safe cooking

For safety and doneness, the internal temperature of the turkey must reach 180° F in the thigh. Set the oven temperature to 325° F. Use a meat thermometer to be sure the correct internal temperature is reached and to prevent overcooking. A meat thermometer should be used even in turkeys that have “pop-up” temperature indicators to ensure a safe temperature of 180° F.

To stuff or not to stuff

The safest way to cook the stuffing is separate from the turkey. But whether the stuffing is cooked inside or outside of the turkey, it must reach an internal temperature of 165° F. If the turkey is stuffed, mix ingredients just prior to filling the cavity. Stuff loosely to help ensure safe, even cooking. Remember, the turkey must reach 180° F, while the stuffing must cook to at least 165° F.

APPROXIMATE COOKING TIMES

<u>Size of Turkey</u>	<u>Cooking Time</u>	<u>Size of Turkey</u>	<u>Cooking Time</u>
<i>Unstuffed</i>		<i>Stuffed</i>	
8 to 12 pounds	2 ¾ to 3 hours	8 to 12 pounds	3 to 3 ½ hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 to 3 ¾ hours	12 to 14 pounds	3 ½ to 4 hours
14 to 18 pounds	3 ¾ to 4 ¼ hours	14 to 18 pounds	4 to 4 ¼ hours
18 to 20 pounds	4 ¼ to 4 ½ hours	18 to 20 pounds	4 ¼ to 4 ¾ hours
20 to 24 pounds	4 ½ to 5 hours	20 to 24 pounds	4 ¾ to 5 ¼ hours

Safe handling of leftovers

Cut leftover turkey into small pieces, or slice. Refrigerate stuffing and turkey separately in shallow containers within 2 hours of cooking. Use leftover turkey and stuffing within 3 to 4 days, and gravy within 1 to 2 days. Gravy should be reheated to a boil and leftovers, if heated, should be thoroughly reheated to 165° F.

For more information

For more information, you can reach USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline toll-free at: **1-800-535-4555**, Monday through Friday, from 10 am to 4 pm Eastern Time. *It also will be open from 8 am to 2 pm ET on Thanksgiving Day.* Timely recorded food safety information can also be heard at the same toll-free number 24 hours a day. The toll-free TTY number is 1-800-256-7072. Additional food safety information is available on the Web at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov>

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