

Thanksgiving Food Safety - Turkey Tips

Whether you are preparing food for a crowd or yourself, remember to make food safety part of your holiday. Raw meats, such as turkey, can be contaminated with germs that can make you and your family sick. Raw turkey can contain Salmonella, Clostridium perfringens, Campylobacter, and other germs. Follow the tips below to avoid illness and prepare your turkey safely:

- 1. Store Turkey Properly** – Frozen raw turkey should be stored in the freezer until you are ready to thaw it. Freezers should be at 0°F or below. Fresh raw turkey can be stored in the refrigerator for 1-2 days before cooking.
- 2. Thaw Turkey Safely** – A turkey can be thawed in the refrigerator, submerged in cold water, or in the microwave. Never thaw a turkey by leaving it out on the counter at room temperature. When a turkey stays out at room temperature for more than 2 hours, the temperature becomes unsafe even if the center is still frozen. For full details on how to safely thaw a turkey, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/communication/holiday-turkey.html>
- 3. Prevent the Spread of Germs** – Raw turkey can contaminate anything it comes into contact with. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 30 seconds before and after handling. Use separate cutting boards for raw and ready to eat foods such as produce. Never place cooked food on a surface that came in contact with raw turkey. Wash all surfaces before and after handling raw turkey.
- 4. Never Wash Turkey** – Washing raw turkey can spread germs to other surfaces and make you and your family sick.
- 5. Cooking Stuffing**– The safest option is to cook stuffing outside of the turkey. If you cook stuffing inside the turkey, use a thermometer to ensure the stuffing's center reaches 165°F. Wait 20 minutes after removing the turkey from the oven before removing the stuffing, this will allow the stuffing additional time to cook.
- 6. Safe Internal Temperature** – Set the oven temperature to at least 325°F. Place the fully thawed turkey in a roasting pan. Cooking time depends on the weight and if it is stuffed. Insert a food thermometer into the innermost part of the thigh, wing, and thickest part of the breast, and ensure the turkey has reached a safe internal temperature of 165°F. Use a thermometer even if your turkey has a pop-up timer. For a stuffed turkey, insert a food thermometer into the stuffing to ensure it reaches 165°F. Let the turkey stand 20 minutes before carving.
- 7. Leftovers** –Refrigerate leftovers at 40°F or below, within 2 hours of cooking to prevent food poisoning. Cut large food items into smaller pieces so they cool quickly. Eat cooked turkey or dishes made with turkey, within 3-4 days. Reheat all leftovers to at least 165°F before eating. For additional information, visit: <https://www.foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/cold-food-storage-charts>
- 8. Food Safety Hotline** – Some turkey retailers offer a customer service food safety hotline for urgent food safety questions. The USDA has a Hotline available to answer food safety



questions during the weekdays: <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/usda-meat-and-poultry-hotline>

For additional information on holiday food safety, please visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/communication/holidays.html>