
IN THIS ISSUE: HOLIDAY FOOD SAFETY

Preparing your Holiday Foods Safely**Introduction**

One of the largest American food holidays is quickly approaching, and with it comes an increased risk of harmful bacteria finding its way on to the dinner table. Turkey, especially raw turkey, can be contaminated with bacteria such as *Salmonella*, *Clostridium perfringens*, and *Campylobacter*. *Clostridium perfringens* is the second most common bacterial cause of food poisoning. Harmful bacteria grow in foods that are left at room temperature and can cause vomiting and abdominal cramps within 6 to 24 hours after eating. The CDC reports that *Clostridium perfringens* outbreaks occur more often during the holiday season in November and December.¹ Foods kept at improper temperatures and leftovers can also harbor harmful bacteria growth. Follow proper food safety (clean, separate, cook, chill) to ensure a safe and happy holiday food season.

Shopping

While out shopping for Thanksgiving, pick up the turkey and other perishable items at the end of the shopping trip so it remains cold as long as possible. Inspect the packaging on the turkey to ensure it is not torn or leaking juices. Raw poultry juices can cause cross-contamination of bacteria. Use plastic bags or keep turkey in a separate part of the shopping cart to prevent any contamination. Use insulated bags with cold sources (like ice packs) if commuting longer than an hour and immediately place perishable items in the refrigerator.

Store properly

Frozen turkey should be stored in the freezer (0°F or below) until ready to thaw. Do not store in places where temperatures cannot be closely monitored (i.e., car trunk, basement, outside, etc.).

Thaw Safely

Never thaw turkey on the counter; bacteria can start to grow after more than 2 hours when temperatures fall into the “danger zone” (41°F-135°F).

- Refrigerator: Place turkey in original wrapping in a container to prevent juices from contaminating other food. Allow 24 hours for each 4 to 5 pounds of turkey. Once thawed, turkey can remain in the refrigerator for 1 to 2 days before cooking.
- Cold Water: Place turkey in leakproof plastic bag before placing in the sink. Turn on the tap to allow cold, flowing water to thaw the turkey. Allow 30 minutes of thawing for each pound of turkey. Cook immediately after thawing. Clean and sanitize the sink before the next use.
- Microwave: Follow manufacturer's instructions for thawing turkey and cook immediately.

To wash or not to wash

Juice from raw poultry can spread in the kitchen and contaminate other foods, utensils, and countertops. If washing a raw turkey, immediately clean and sanitize sink and surrounding area.

Handle Correctly

- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling turkey.
- Designate one cutting board for raw turkey and a separate one for produce, bread, and other foods that will not be cooked.
- Do not place cooked food or fresh produce on any surface that held a raw turkey.
- Wash cutting boards, utensils, dishes, and countertops with hot soapy water after preparing raw turkey and before you prepare the next item.

Cook stuffing thoroughly

Cooking stuffing in a casserole dish is the easiest way to ensure stuffing is thoroughly cooked. If stuffing is going to be cooked inside of the turkey, place the stuffing inside the turkey cavity just before cooking.

Use a food thermometer to ensure the center of the stuffing reaches 165°F. If stuffing is cooked inside the turkey, wait 20 minutes after taking it out of the oven to remove the stuffing. This allows stuffing time to cook a little longer.

Cook thoroughly

Roast the turkey in an oven that reaches at least 325°F. Cooking times will depend on the weight of the turkey and if it is stuffed. Use a food thermometer to ensure turkey has reached an internal temperature of 165°F. Insert thermometer into three places, avoiding bone: (1) thickest part of the breast (2) where body and thigh join, aiming toward the thigh and (3) where the body and wing join, aiming toward the wing.

Figure 1: Areas on Turkey to Check Internal Temperatures



Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/food-safety/foods/holiday-turkey.html#:~:text=Turkey%20and%20its%20juice%20can,can, care%20to%20prevent%20food%20poisoning>

If cooking turkey using another method (i.e., smoking, frying, not completely thawed) visit Turkey: Alternative Routes to the Table

(<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/poultry/turkey-alternate-routes-table#8>) for guidance from the USDA on cooking turkey safely.

Serving

Follow the 2-hour rule, perishable foods that have sat out at room temperature for more than 2 hours should be discarded due to bacterial growth. Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Foods such as turkey, macaroni and cheese, stuffing, and mashed potatoes should be kept at 135°F and above. Foods

can be kept warm by using warming trays, chafing dishes, slow cookers, etc.

Cold foods (salad, cranberry relish, deviled eggs, and cold dips) should be kept below 41°F. They can be kept in trays or bowls over ice.

Leftovers

Thanksgiving leftovers should be refrigerated at 41°F or colder within 2 hours of cooking to prevent growth of bacteria that can cause food poisoning. Any food that has been exposed to temperatures higher than 90°F (i.e., in a hot car) should be refrigerated within 1 hour.

For larger cuts of meat, cut into smaller pieces so they can cool quicker. Food doesn't need to be cool to store in the refrigerator or freezer. Any leftover turkey or dishes made with it, such as soups or casseroles, should be eaten within 3 to 4 days. Freeze if wishing to keep those foods longer.

Leftovers should be reheated to at least 165°F.

Reporting

Please submit any foodborne illness complaints to Northern Nevada Public Health's Environmental Health Team by calling 775-328-2434 and choosing option #8 or online by visiting, (<https://www.nnph.org/resources/complaints.php>).

Report communicable diseases to Northern Nevada Public Health. To report a communicable disease, please call 775-328-2447 or fax your report to the NNPH at 775-328-3764.

Acknowledgement

Northern Nevada Public Health wishes Washoe county a safe and happy holiday season.

References

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Preparing Your Holiday Turkey Safely. Accessed November 2024 <https://www.cdc.gov/food-safety/foods/holiday-turkey.html#:~:text=Turkey%20and%20its%20juice%20can,can, care%20to%20prevent%20food%20poisoning>.
- 2 U.S. Department of Agriculture. Keep Food Safety in Mind this Thanksgiving. Accessed November 2024 <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2024/11/12/keep-food-safety-mind-thanksgiving>.
- 3 Northern Nevada Public Health. Food Establishment Regulations. Accessed November 2024 <https://www.nnph.org/resources/regulations.php>.