

“Talking Turkey, Keeping your Thanksgiving and Holiday meals safe”

It is estimated that close to 50 million turkeys are consumed on Thanksgiving Day! Thanksgiving is also one of the days of the year where the most foodborne illness occur. Help keep yourself and your guest’s safe by applying the following food safety principles and practices during your Thanksgiving turkey meal and during the entire Holiday season. Large meals, including serving a turkey, are a big part of many people’s holidays, and ensuring they are safe is something that takes some knowledge and effort.

Thawing: Never thaw your bird at room temperature on a counter top. The outside thaws quickly into the temperature “**danger zone**” of **45-140F** and bacteria could quickly start reproducing. Instead, use a refrigerator where you can thaw it gradually. You will need some pre-planning however. For every 5 lbs. the Turkey weights, you will need 24 hours of thawing time. And if you don’t have space in a refrigerator or worried about the thawing bird dripping and contaminating other food, use a cold garage or porch by putting the turkey in a cooler big enough to hold it. Don’t have the time to thaw these ways? Then put the turkey in a clean pan in the sink, fill the pan with cold water, and let cold water keep running over the turkey for several hours. Don’t waste a lot of water or allow it to splash. Turn it down to a thin, steady stream, but keep it cold and keep it running. The more you thaw the turkey, the easier it will be to cook to the required temperature without over-cooking or burning the outside of it.

Preparing: Use a clean and sanitized work area and tools (avoid sponges), including your hands! Wash your hands with **warm to hot water for 20 seconds** and dry them with a disposable paper towel, not a common towel. **It is not recommended that you wash your turkey.** Many people do, and do not realize that it is very possible your raw turkey is loaded with salmonella. Research shows that you can splash these germs three feet from your sink onto food or other surfaces that can spread them around. If you feel you need to wash the turkey, do so very carefully and then wash, clear rinse and then sanitize within three feet of the sink. Ensure there is no other food in close proximity. Even if you do not wash your turkey, ensure you clean and sanitize the immediate area and equipment you used. **Sanitizing** can be accomplished using only a few drops of bleach in a quart of room temperature water or by using a purchased ready- to-use sanitizer. Again, don’t forget about handwashing when done handling your turkey.



Cooking: All parts of your turkey must be cooked to a minimum of 165F. You must have a clean and calibrated food thermometer. You cannot tell by time and color alone. Check your thermometer’s accuracy by placing it in a slurry of ice water. If it is dead on it should read 32F after stabilizing. Check the bird’s temperature in these three critical locations: **Thickest part of the breast, innermost part of the wing and innermost part of the thigh**. And if you stuff your bird, make sure the stuffing reaches 165F also. Juices flow from the bird into the stuffing, which is thick and is in the core center of the cavity. The entire turkey may have reached the correct temperature but the stuffing may not have. If

you do not want to cook the turkey any longer due to dryness and the stuffing has not reached 165F, use a microwave oven to finish it off to the proper temperature.



Serving: When slicing the turkey, use clean and sanitized equipment, wash hands and **wear clean disposable gloves**. Do not go more than 2 hours with the turkey left out at room temperature before being consumed or refrigerated. More than two hours in that danger zone again could allow any harmful bacteria grow to sufficient quantities to cause illness.

Left overs: Quickly cool left overs using a refrigerator or freeze them. If using a refrigerator, do not pile the turkey too thick (no more than two inches) and leave it **uncovered** until it cools to refrigerator temperatures. Leaving it uncovered allows it to cool quicker, but ensure no contamination drips from other items in the refrigerator onto the turkey while cooling. Once it is fully cooled, cover it tightly and **use within four days.**

Following the above practices will help to ensure your turkey meal is a wholesome product for all your guests and not make them ill during this special time of year.... Bon Appetit!