



THANKSGIVING FOOD SAFETY

- ⇒ Avoid cross contamination by thoroughly washing hands, cutting boards, and utensils before and after contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs. Keep raw meat, poultry, and seafood apart from foods that won't be cooked, such as salads, etc.
- ⇒ The safest way to cook stuffing is separate from the turkey. Stuffing placed in an uncooked turkey can be contaminated with bacteria. If you choose to cook stuffing inside your turkey, stuff it loosely to ensure safe, even cooking. Be sure the stuffing reaches an internal temperature of 165°.
- ⇒ If you do a holiday buffet, servings should be kept small and refilled often, directly from the stove or refrigerator. The longer food is kept out (especially over 2 hours), the higher the risk of food poisoning. Keep hot foods hot! Keep cold foods cold!
- ⇒ Carefully store leftovers within 2 hours of cooking. Perishable foods left at room temperature for over 2 hours are susceptible to bacterial growth. Slice turkey before refrigerating. Store stuffing and turkey separately in shallow, covered containers.

How to Safely Thaw your Turkey

While frozen, turkeys are safe from bacteria. As soon as a turkey begins to thaw, bacteria may begin to grow, again. Frozen meat left to thaw on the counter for over 2 hours is not at a safe temperature. Even though the inside might still be frozen, the outer layer is in the "Danger Zone," (bacteria multiply rapidly in food between 40° and 140° F).

Refrigerator Thawing:

⇒ Allow 24 hours for each 4 to 5 pounds of turkey.

Size of Whole Turkey	Thawing Time in Refrigerator
4 to 12 pounds	1 to 3 days
12 to 16 pounds	3 to 4 days
16 to 20 pounds	4 to 5 days
20 to 24 pounds	5 to 6 days

⇒ Place turkey in a container to prevent juices from dripping on other foods.

⇒ Turkey can remain in refrigerator for 1 or 2 days before cooking.

Cold Water Thawing:

⇒ Allow about 30 minutes per pound of turkey.

Size of Whole Turkey	Thawing Time in Refrigerator
4 to 12 pounds	2 to 6 hours
12 to 16 pounds	6 to 8 hours
16 to 20 pounds	8 to 10 hours
20 to 24 pounds	10 to 12 hours

⇒ Place turkey in a leak-proof plastic bag to prevent cross-contamination and to prevent turkey from taking on water.

⇒ Completely cover the wrapped turkey in

cold tap water. Change water every 30 minutes until the turkey is thawed.

⇒ Cook the turkey immediately after it is thawed!

Microwave Thawing:

⇒ Follow microwave oven manufacturer's instructions for defrosting poultry.

⇒ Place turkey in a container, as holding partially cooked turkey is not recommended because of the bacteria present.

⇒ A turkey thawed in a microwave must be cooked immediately because some areas of the turkey may become warm and begin to cook.

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/PDF/Turkey_Basics_Safe_Thawing.pdf

How to Safely Cook your Turkey

1. Set oven to 325°F. Preheating is not necessary.
2. Be sure turkey is completely thawed.
3. Place turkey breast-side up on a flat, wire rack in a shallow roasting pan (2 to 2 1/2 inches deep).
4. It's best to cook stuffing separately. If stuffing your turkey, mix ingredients just before stuffing and stuff loosely.
5. For safety, the internal temperature of the turkey should be checked with a food thermometer. Check the turkey's temperature in 3 areas: thigh, wing, and thickest part of breast. All parts of turkey and stuffing must reach a minimum of 165°F.
6. Let the turkey stand 20 minutes before removing stuffing and carving.

Unstuffed Turkey	Cooking Time
8 to 12 pounds	2 3/4 to 3 hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 to 3 3/4 hours
14 to 18 pounds	3 3/4 to 4 1/4 hours
18 to 20 pounds	4 1/4 to 4 1/2 hours
20 to 24 pounds	4 1/2 to 5 hours

Stuffed Turkey	Cooking Time
8 to 12 pounds	3 to 3 1/2 hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 1/2 to 4 hours
14 to 18 pounds	4 to 4 1/4 hours
18 to 20 pounds	4 1/4 to 4 3/4 hours
20 to 24 pounds	4 3/4 to 5 1/4 hours

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For More Information

If you have questions: call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854).

Year-round Monday through Friday from 10am to 4pm Eastern Time. English or Spanish. Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day.



Send email questions to:
MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov



