

Food Safety Tips for Turkey

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Like any raw meat, turkey can be contaminated with bacteria or other germs that can make you sick. Just in recent months, raw turkey products have been linked to a multistate outbreak of *Salmonella* infections.

You can prevent food poisoning by handling turkey and other holiday foods safely. Remember that food poisoning can happen at home as well as when eating out. Always follow these steps with handling turkey.

Safely Thaw Your Turkey

The safest method for thawing turkey is in the refrigerator. This method takes time, so allow one day for each 4 - 5 pounds of weight. If your turkey weighs 16 pounds, it will take about four days to thaw. Once thawed, the turkey is safe for another two days, so you can start thawing it six days before Thanksgiving (the Friday before Thanksgiving).

The other two methods (cold water and microwave) must be done immediately before you start cooking the turkey, so you'll have to wait until the day it will be cooked.

Cold water method. For this method, leave the turkey in its original wrapping and submerge it in a sink (or container) full of cold water. It is important that the water be cold so that the turkey stays at a safe temperature. You should change the water every 30 minutes. Empty out the water and replace it with fresh cold water. With this method, allow 30 minutes of defrosting time per pound, so a 16 pound turkey will take 8 hours to thaw. Once the turkey has thawed, cook it immediately.



Microwave method. First check your owner's manual for the size turkey that will fit in your microwave oven, the minutes per pound and the power level to use when thawing a turkey. Remove all outside wrapping and place the turkey on a microwave-safe dish to catch any juices that may leak. Use the defrost function based on weight. As a general rule, allow 6 minutes per pound when thawing a turkey in the microwave. Be sure to rotate it several times, and even flip it, during the thawing process.

If the turkey starts to cook instead of defrost, let it rest for 5 minutes before you resume thawing. Partway through thawing you may wish to cover the tips of the wings and drumsticks with a small piece of foil to shield them from the microwaves and keep them from cooking. Once the turkey has thawed you should cook it immediately.

Never thaw your turkey by leaving it out on the counter. A frozen turkey is safe indefinitely, but a thawing turkey must defrost at a safe temperature. When the turkey is left out at room temperature for more than two hours, its temperature becomes unsafe as it moves into the danger zone between 40°F and 140°F, where bacteria can grow rapidly.

Safely Handle Your Turkey

Raw poultry can contaminate anything it touches with harmful bacteria.

Clean your hands and surfaces often.

- Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water before, during, and after preparing food and before eating.
- Wash your utensils, cutting boards, and countertops with hot, soapy water.

Separate raw turkey and the juices from other foods.

- Use separate cutting boards and plates for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Keep raw turkey and juices away from other foods when shopping and in the fridge.
- Transfer raw turkey from packaging to the pan. Washing raw poultry will spread harmful germs in your kitchen and on you.

Safely Stuff Your Turkey

Cooking stuffing in a casserole dish makes it easy to make sure it is thoroughly cooked. If you put stuffing in the turkey, do so just before cooking. Use a food thermometer to make sure the stuffing's center reaches 165°F. Wait for 20 minutes after removing the bird from the oven before removing the stuffing from the turkey's cavity; this allows it to cook a little more.



Safely Cook Your Turkey

Set the oven temperature to at least 325°F. Place the thawed turkey with the breast side up in a roasting pan that is 2 to 2-1/2 inches deep. To make sure the turkey has reached a safe internal temperature of 165°F, insert a food thermometer into the center of the stuffing and the thickest portions of the breast, thigh, and wing joint. Let the turkey stand 20 minutes before removing all stuffing from the cavity and carving the meat.

Safely Store Your Leftovers

With enough time, some bacteria will grow in food even when it is cooked to a safe temperature. Refrigerate leftovers at 40°F or colder as soon as possible or within two hours of preparation to prevent food poisoning.

APPROXIMATE COOKING TIMES FOR WHOLE TURKEY (325 °F oven temperature)

UNSTUFFED (time in hours)

4 to 6 lb. breast — 1 1/2 to 2 1/4
6 to 8 lb. breast — 2 1/4 to 3 1/4
8 to 12 lbs. — 2 3/4 to 3
12 to 14 lbs. — 3 to 3 3/4
14 to 18 lbs. — 3 3/4 to 4 1/4
18 to 20 lbs. — 4 1/4 to 4 1/2
20 to 24 lbs. — 4 1/2 to 5

STUFFED (time in hours)

8 to 12 lbs. — 3 to 3 1/2
12 to 14 lbs. — 3 1/2 to 4
14 to 18 lbs. — 4 to 4 1/4
18 to 20 lbs. — 4 1/4 to 4 3/4
20 to 24 lbs. — 4 3/4 to 5 1/4