



Cooking up a Safe Thanksgiving

From the turkey to the stuffing, use these tips to prepare a safe meal this Thanksgiving.

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Two keys to preparing a safe Thanksgiving dinner is to wash all countertops and utensils and to pay attention to food temperatures. Whether you're hosting your first Thanksgiving or you're a Turkey Day pro, your No. 1 goal this year should be to serve up a warm, delicious and safe meal. Because food safety is only one of the thoughts you are juggling as you clean the house and prepare for hungry guests, use this safety checklist to keep your food preparations on track and stomach-friendly.

Pre-cooking Preparation

Disinfect counters and cutting boards. Start out Thanksgiving Day with a bacteria-free kitchen. Use a solution of 1 tablespoon unscented chlorine bleach per gallon of water and get scrubbing.

Buy a food thermometer. This will be your best friend in food safety this week.

Always wash your hands. Keeping your hands clean throughout your Thanksgiving preparations will help stop the spread of bacteria. Wash with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds. The Turkey Defrost frozen turkeys early. As a general rule, allow a thaw time of one day per every 5 pounds of turkey. If you missed the date, thaw your turkey in a sink of warm water, changing the water every 30 minutes. Allow a half hour thaw time for every pound.

Avoid the counter. Never defrost a turkey on the counter. Instead, place it on a drip pan so that you can easily clean the mess.

Cook the turkey right. Bake at a minimum of 325 degrees F to kill all bacteria. Do not bake all night on a lower temperature. To make sure the turkey is cooked through, use a food thermometer to test the innermost part of the thigh, wing and breast. The temperature should read no lower than 165 degrees F. The Stuffing
Cook the stuffing immediately. Mix the wet and dry ingredients for the stuffing on Thanksgiving Day, right before cooking, to ensure you don't grow any unwanted bacteria.

Keep the stuffing moist. Heat does a better job of killing bacteria in a moist environment.

Check stuffing's temperature. The temperature of stuffing cooked inside the turkey should be at least 165 degrees F.

Throw out fresh, pre-stuffed turkeys. The USDA says the stuffing in these turkeys is highly perishable and breeding grounds for bacteria. Throw these turkeys away or try to get your money back. Thanksgiving Side Dishes
Think ahead. Go ahead and make your breads and vegetable side dishes (like a yummy green bean casserole). Just be sure to keep them refrigerated at or below 40 degrees F.

Separate, separate, separate. Keep your fruits and vegetables away from your meat and poultry to avoid cross-contamination. Thanksgiving Leftovers
Keep them cool. Immediately refrigerate all leftovers at a temperature below 40 degrees F to stop the spread of bacteria. Any dishes left out longer than two hours should be thrown out.

Freeze for the future. Leftover turkey keeps in the freezer for three to four months.

Reheat safely. When reheating leftovers, cook to at least 165 degrees F.
For more information on how to host the perfect Thanksgiving, consult this list of tips and recipes.

This Thanksgiving safety list was compiled with information provided by the USDA and the Partnership for Food Safety Education.