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Food Safety Tips for your Holiday Turkey

Improper handling and cooking of poultry is one of the most common ways to develop a foodborne disease. Follow these safety tips to keep you and your family safe this Thanksgiving.

1. Safely thaw your turkey.

Thaw turkeys in the refrigerator, in a sink of cold water that is changed every thirty minutes, or in the microwave. Never thaw your turkey by leaving it sit out on the counter. The turkey must defrost at a safe temperature. When a 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 degrees Fahrenheit and 140 degrees Fahrenheit. This temperature zone is where bacteria grows rapidly.

2. Safely handle your turkey.

Raw poultry can contaminate anything it touches with harmful bacteria. Follow the cook, clean, chill, and separate steps from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to prevent the spread of bacteria to your food and family.

3. Safely stuff your turkey.

Cooking stuffing in a casserole dish makes it easy to ensure 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 degrees Fahrenheit. Bacteria can survive in stuffing that has not reached 165 degrees Fahrenheit and may cause food poisoning. Wait 20 minutes after removing your turkey from the oven before removing any stuffing. By waiting 20 minutes you allow the turkey and stuffing to cook a while longer.

4. Safely cook your turkey.

Set your oven temperature to at least 325 degrees Fahrenheit. Place the completely thawed turkey with the breast side up in a roasting pan that is 2 to 2-1/2 inches deep. Cooking times will vary depending on the weight of the turkey. Use a food thermometer to ensure the turkey reaches 165 degrees Fahrenheit at the thickest portions of the breast, thigh, and wing joint. Rest the turkey 20 minutes before removing stuffing and carving the meat.

To learn more about how to safely prepare a turkey for your holiday meal visit www.cdc.gov/features/turkeytime/index.html.
