



NEWS

R E L E A S E

Illinois Department of Public Health

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Unwanted Thanksgiving Guest - Foodborne Illness

Safe food handling guidelines for a healthier holiday

SPRINGFIELD – Avoid spending this holiday season feeling ill because of unwanted guests such as *Salmonella*, *Listeria* or *E. coli* (*Escherichia coli* O157:H7) bacteria. There are some simple things you can do to avoid foodborne illness.

“Two of the most important things to remember for a safe Thanksgiving feast are to make sure to fully thaw and cook the turkey, and properly wash with soap and warm water your hands, utensils and anything else that comes into contact with raw meats or juices,” said Dr. Craig Conover, Illinois Department of Public Health acting director.

If you decide to prepare a fresh turkey, buy it no more than two days ahead of the big meal and make sure you have room to store it in the refrigerator. If you chose a frozen turkey, make sure the turkey is completely thawed in the refrigerator. Never defrost a turkey on the kitchen counter. To thaw in the refrigerator, allow approximately 24 hours per five pounds of turkey. The turkey should be placed on a tray or pan to catch any juices that may leak. A thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator safely for one to two days. If the inner cavity is still frozen or even partially frozen when you put the turkey in the oven, the inside temperature will not be hot enough to destroy disease-causing bacteria.

Thawing Time in the Refrigerator

Size of Turkey	Number of Days
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

It is safer to cook the stuffing separately, but if you do stuff the bird, do so just before cooking it and stuff it loosely so it cooks thoroughly. If stuffing is mixed the day before the meal, pre-mix only the dry ingredients. Mixing moist ingredients ahead of time allows bacteria an opportunity to grow.

Approximate Cooking Times for Turkey

(325 degree F° oven temperature)

Unstuffed

Size of Turkey	Cooking Time
8 to 12 pounds	2 ¾ to 3 hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 to 3 ¾ hours
14 to 18 pounds	3 ¾ to 4 ¼ hours
18 to 20 pounds	4 ¼ to 4 ½ hours
20 to 24 pounds	4 ½ to 5 hours

Stuffed

Size of Turkey	Cooking Time
8 to 12 pounds	3 to 3 ½ hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 ½ to 4 hours
14 to 18 pounds	4 to 4 ¼ hours
18 to 20 pounds	4 ¼ to 4 ¾ hours
20 to 24 pounds	4 ¾ to 5 ¼ hours

If you use a turkey fryer, make sure the turkey is completely thawed and be careful with marinades. Oil and water don't mix and water can cause oil to spill over, starting a fire or even an explosion hazard. Most turkey fryers have no thermostat controls, increasing their potential to overheat cooking oil to the point of combustion.

To check the temperature of the turkey, insert a meat thermometer into the center of the thickest part of the thigh, breast or stuffing. All turkey meat, including any that remains pink, is safe to eat as soon as all parts reach at least 165 degrees F°. The stuffing should also reach 165 degrees F°, whether it is cooked inside the bird or in a separate dish.

It is important to immediately refrigerate leftovers. If they are left to sit for several hours at room temperature, disease-causing bacteria can grow. Also, refrigerate stuffing and other leftovers separate from the bird.

When eating leftovers, they either need to be very cold (directly from the refrigerator) or very hot (at least 165 degrees F°). Refrigerated turkey and stuffing should be used within three to four days and gravy within a day or two.

For more information about safe holiday cooking, log onto www.idph.state.il.us/public/hb/hbcook.htm.

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