

Try tested turkey tips for safe Thanksgiving meals

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For Immediate Release

Thanksgiving is a time for sharing – but don't let that include sharing food-borne illnesses. Follow these tested turkey tips, courtesy of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to ensure a safe meal.

First, decide if you want a fresh or frozen turkey. If you plan to purchase a frozen bird in advance, be sure you have adequate freezer space to accommodate it. If you opt for a fresh bird, plan to make your purchase one to two days prior to cooking your meal.

Next, decide what size bird you need. If you want to serve a whole turkey, the USDA recommends this calculation: Add one pound of turkey for each person you plan to feed.

If you buy a frozen bird, factor safe thawing time into your schedule. The USDA recommends two safe options. Choose refrigerator thawing or cold-water thawing.

To use the refrigerator method, keep the frozen turkey in its original wrapper. Place the bird in a refrigerator that registers at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below. Thawing will take approximately 24 hours per four to five pounds of turkey. For example, a 16- to 20-pound turkey will take four to five days to thaw.

If you purchase a frozen turkey a day or two before your dinner guests are due to arrive, the cold-water method is your safest thawing method. Keep the turkey submerged in cold water, changing the water every 30 minutes. Safe thawing requires approximately 30 minutes of cold-water time per one pound of turkey. For example, a 16- to 20-pound turkey will take eight to ten hours to thaw.

Washing the turkey is not needed because cooking will destroy bacteria. Washing the turkey increases the risk of cross contamination to other foods in your kitchen.

Finally, roast the bird in a 325-degree Fahrenheit oven. Cooking times will vary depending on the size of the bird. For specific cooking times and other safety steps, check the USDA's Web site at www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets/Countdown_to_the_Holiday/index.asp.

Sanitize your work area after the turkey is in the oven. Wash with hot soapy water, rinse and apply sanitizing solution. Solution can be ready made or make your own with 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water.

The turkey is ready when the minimum internal temperature is 165 degrees Fahrenheit throughout the bird. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the turkey. Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and in the thickest part of the breast. Let the turkey stand 15 to 20 minutes before carving.

Do not let the turkey stay at room temperature for more than two hours. Cooked turkey will keep for three to four days in the refrigerator and stuffing and gravy will keep for one to two days. Frozen leftovers will keep for four months. Heat leftovers to 165 degrees Fahrenheit to destroy bacteria.

Have more food safety questions, call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline toll free at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854). The hotline is open year-round Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The West Virginia University Extension Service provides solutions that work for you and your family. For more information contact Kerri Wade, WVU Extension agent with the Kanawha County office of the WVU Extension Service, at (304) 720-9573 or visit <http://kanawha.ext.wvu.edu>