

Food Safety - Lets Talk Turkey

It's that time of the year again when our thoughts turn to family, friends and of course the traditional turkey dinner of Christmas. Soon many of us will be preparing this meal and not thinking of the symptoms of diarrhea, cramps and nausea, which are indicative of salmonella food poisoning. However, each year many people become ill with salmonella and other types of food poisoning by eating improperly prepared or cooked poultry. Did you know that there are more than 2000 different types of salmonella bacteria, each causing similar symptoms? The intensity of these symptoms will vary according to the amount of bacteria consumed and the individual's susceptibility, but, ALL salmonella food poisoning is preventable by observing the following basic rules:

- Always cover fresh turkey with wax paper, plastic wrap or aluminum foil and store it at the bottom of the refrigerator. Fresh meat like turkey should be cooked within 2-3 days of purchase.
- In order to keep food free from contamination, be sure to **wash your hands frequently and disinfect food contact surfaces** like cutting boards and knives between each individual use.
- Temperature abuse is the main culprit in food poisonings. Temperature abuse refers to allowing a hazardous food such as turkey to stay in the "DANGER ZONE" too long. The danger zone is temperatures between 4°C/39°F (refrigeration) and 60°C/140°F (hot holding). Bacteria can multiply to dangerous levels if held between these temperatures for prolonged periods of time.
- All raw poultry should be considered to be contaminated with salmonella bacteria. One way to keep your turkey safe is by keeping your bird out of the "danger zone" while defrosting and cooking. Ideally, **turkey should be defrosted in the refrigerator** but it may also be safely defrosted in the **microwave oven or under cold running water**. Defrosting at room temperature is unsafe because while the inside of your turkey is still frozen, the outside is in the danger zone allowing harmful bacteria to multiply.
- Cooking turkey at temperatures less than 162°C/325°F is dangerous because it allows the inside of the turkey to remain at an unsafe temperature for too long.
- For this reason **low temperature, long time cooking is not recommended**. A meat thermometer, inserted into the thigh muscle, is essential in determining the final **internal cooking temperature** which should read **82°C/180°F** or higher for at least 15 seconds.

- Due to the length of time it takes for the heat to penetrate the centre of the turkey and the subsequent potential for food poisoning organism growth, it is **recommended that the dressing be cooked outside the bird.**
- Although use of a meat thermometer is the only way to ensure a properly cooked bird, the following cooking times can be used as long as no red or pink colour remains and the juices run clear.

Hours of Roasting Needed For Cooking a Thawed, Un-stuffed Bird at 162°C (325°F)	
Weight	Time
3 to 3.5kg (6-8lbs)	2 ½ to 2 ¾
3.5 to 4.5kg (8-10lbs)	2 ¾ to 3
4.5 to 5.5kg (10-12lbs)	3 to 3 ¼
5.5 to 7kg (12-16lbs)	3 ¼ to 3 ½
7 to 10 kg (16-22lbs)	3 ½ to 4

- Left over turkey, stuffing and gravy should be handled with the same care and respect for temperature control. The temperature of these products should be reduced to 4°C or lower as soon as possible after the meal.

For more information contact a Public Health Inspector
Ask for other available materials on food safety