

MEDIA RELEASE

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FOOD SAFETY FACTS FOR COOKING CHRISTMAS TURKEY

Foodborne illness, also known as "food poisoning" may happen because of using improper techniques when buying, preparing and cooking a turkey. Follow these food safety tips to help reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

It's always important to keep foods out of the "Danger Zone", which is between 4° C (40° F) and 60° C (140° F). To do this, just keep hot foods hot, at least 60° C (140° F) and keep cold foods cold at 4° C (40° F) or colder.

Buying a turkey

- Check the "best before" date on fresh turkeys because it indicates the freshness of the turkey.
- Frozen, well wrapped turkeys can be kept in the freezer for up to one year.
- If buying a frozen turkey, allow four to six days for thawing in the refrigerator (depending on the size).
- If buying fresh turkey, purchase it no more than two days before cooking. It should be cold when bought then immediately refrigerated at home at a temperature of 4° C (40° F) or lower.
- At the grocery store, the turkey should be the last item selected before proceeding to the checkout.
- Do not let the turkey come into contact with other items in the grocery cart. Put the turkey in a separate plastic bag to avoid cross-contaminating other foods.

Thawing the turkey

- Never thaw turkey on the kitchen counter.
- Place the turkey in the refrigerator in a large container or on a platter big enough to prevent leaking juices from contaminating other foods in the refrigerator. Place on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator.
- Start thawing the frozen turkey in the refrigerator several days before roasting. Allow 24 hours of defrosting time for each 2.5kg (5 pounds) of turkey (i.e., 5 hours/lb. or 10 hours/kg).
- Turkey can be defrosted under cold running water, but it should be wrapped in leak proof plastic to help prevent cross-contamination.
- If thawing turkey in the microwave, cook the turkey immediately after thawing is complete.

Preparing the turkey

- Thoroughly clean your hands, the counter and all utensils before & after preparing the turkey.
- Immediately after preparing the turkey, wash and sanitize the sink, counter tops, utensils and anything else that came in contact with the turkey with a mild bleach solution (ex. 1 tsp. bleach per 3 cups water). Rinse with clean water.
- Do not let any juices from the turkey come in contact with other food or food preparation equipment.

Cooking the turkey

- Never slow-cook turkey. Set the oven no lower than 177° C (350° F) and use a food thermometer to check that the turkey reaches a minimum internal temperature of 85° C (185° F).
- The stuffing should reach a minimum internal temperature of 74° C (165° F).
- For whole turkey: near the end of the cooking time, remove meat from heat and insert an instant-read thermometer into the thickest part of the breast or thigh meat, so the thermometer does not touch any bone. Follow the manufacturer's directions on the proper use of your specific food thermometer. If the proper temperature has been achieved, the food is safe to eat. If the food has not reached the proper temperature, continue cooking. Always wash the food thermometer and other utensils you used on raw or partially cooked foods before using them to check foods again.
- If you choose to serve a pre-cooked, stuffed turkey which is purchased hot, be sure to keep it in the oven to keep the turkey at least 60° C (140° F) or above and eat it within two hours of purchase. If you will be eating this turkey more than two hours after buying it, the stuffing should be removed and both it and the bird should be refrigerated to 4° C (40° F) or lower as soon as possible after purchase.

Serving the turkey

- Serve turkey and stuffing immediately. Keep the rest of the turkey and stuffing hot at a minimum 60° C (140° F) in the oven . Replace empty platters with hot food from the oven.

Turkey leftovers

- Refrigerate leftovers promptly in uncovered, shallow containers so they cool quickly. Once food is cooled, cover.
- Remove meat from the bone. Store meat, stuffing and gravy separately in shallow containers to cool them quickly.
- Reheat leftovers to 74° C (165° F) or hotter. Bring gravy to a full, rolling boil and stir during the reheating process.
- Use leftovers within two to three days.

For more information on preparing foods for the holidays and safe food handling practices, visit the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) website at www.inspection.gc.ca or contact your local public health inspector. Have a safe and happy holiday season!

CIPHI would like to acknowledge the CFIA and the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education as the references for this information.

