

Food Safety for the Holidays

As the holiday season approaches once again, so do increased chances of foodborne illness (‘food poisoning’). An estimated 76 million cases occur annually in the United States, requiring 325,000 hospitalizations, and resulting in 5,200 deaths. Although infants and the elderly are most at risk, *anyone* can be a victim. Here are some tips to help you avoid having your holiday dinner ruined by something that can easily be avoided.

The two ‘Golden Rules’ of food safety are: (1) Keep everything in the kitchen clean (especially your hands.) This helps prevent cross-contamination of disease-causing bacteria from uncooked foods to ready-to-eat foods; and (2), Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. This means keeping foods out of the ‘danger zone’, the temperature between 40° F and 140° F where bacteria will rapidly grow. So foods should either be kept **below 40° F** or **above 140° F**.

Purchasing a Turkey

First of all, make sure you have room to store the bird in your refrigerator or freezer. If you purchase a frozen turkey, it can be thawed in one of two ways. One is in the refrigerator. You should allow 24 hours for every 5 pounds. Another is in cold water. In this case, the water should be changed every 30 minutes until it is thawed. Remember, if the turkey is not completely thawed when you begin cooking, the outside will be done before the inside, and the inside temperature will not get high enough to kill disease-causing bacteria. And never, NEVER defrost on the kitchen counter.

If you purchase a fresh turkey, do so one to two days before you plan on cooking it. Also, be sure to store it on the lowest shelf in your refrigerator. That way, if wrapper leaks, it won’t leak onto and contaminate other foods.

Size of Turkey	Thawing in Refrigerator	Thawing in Water
8 to 12 lbs	1 to 2 days	4 to 6 hours
12 to 16 lbs	2 to 3 days	6 to 8 hours
16 to 20 lbs	3 to 4 days	8 to 10 hours
20 to 24 lbs	4 to 5 days	10 to 12 hours

Stuffing

Cooking the stuffing separate from the turkey is safest. If you do choose to cook it inside the turkey, the stuffing should reach an internal temperature of **165°**. Mix the ingredients just prior to filling, and stuff loosely to help ensure even, thorough cooking. The turkey itself must reach an internal temperature of **180°** (measured in the thigh).

Use this chart as a guide for cooking stuffed or unstuffed turkey.

Size of Turkey	Cooking Time	Size of Turkey	Cooking Time
<i>Unstuffed</i>	at 325°	<i>Stuffed</i>	at 325°
8 to 12 lbs.	2 ¾ to 3 hrs	8 to 12 lbs.	3 to 3 ½ hrs
12 to 14 lbs.	3 to 3 ¾ hrs	12 to 14 lbs.	3 ½ to 4 hrs
14 to 18 lbs.	3 ¾ to 4 ¼ hrs	14 to 18 lbs.	4 to 4 ¼ hrs
18 to 20 lbs.	4 ¼ to 4 ½ hrs	18 to 20 lbs.	4 ¼ to 4 ¾ hrs
20 to 24 lbs.	4 ½ to 5 hrs	20 to 24 lbs.	4 ¾ to 5 ¼ hrs

Other Meats

Not everyone prefers turkey. Here are some other holiday favorites and their proper cooking temperatures.

Note: The following should be cooked thoroughly to the indicated (minimum) temperature.*

	Temp.		Temp.
Deer	165°	Chicken	165°
Rabbit	180°	Turkey Roast (boneless)	165°
Duck	165°	Fresh Pork Chops, Roast, Ribs	145°
Goose	165°	Fresh Cured Ham	145°
		Ratites (Ostrich, Emu, Rhea)	155°

*Be sure your thermometer is accurate. Ice water is often the easiest way to calibrate a thermometer.

Leftovers

Because almost no one finishes off a holiday meal on the first sitting, there is undoubtedly going to be leftovers. Turkey should be sliced thinly or cut into small pieces. Then place turkey and stuffing *separately* into shallow containers. This should be done within 2 hours of cooking. The same basic rules apply to pork and game. Just make sure you have small pieces and use shallow containers.

Leftover turkey should be used within 3 to 4 days, and gravy within 1 to 2 days. When reheating, heat thoroughly to **165°**, or don't reheat at all (eating foods directly from the refrigerator).

Microwaves

When using a microwave oven to cook any type of meat, cook to a minimum temperature of at least 165°F throughout since the cooking method does not provide the same lethality to microorganisms as does conventional cooking methods.

If you have any questions, or would like more information, please call 384-3621 and ask for Steve Furches or Doug Pelton.

Sources: *Holiday Cooking*, Illinois Dept. of Public Health
USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, Release #0457.99