



Turduckens Require Safe Food Handling

Cub sandwiches, lasagna, and eggs Benedict are examples of foods assembled in layers. However, “turducken” — a layered poultry dish especially popular during the holidays — is an exceptionally risky one that requires safe food handling and thorough cooking to prevent foodborne illness.

The “turducken” is a deboned stuffed chicken inside a deboned stuffed duck inside a deboned stuffed turkey. The name is comprised of syllables from the words “turkey,” “duck,” and “chicken.” Usually the tip end of the turkey leg bones and the first two wing joints are left on the turkey so that after assembly, the finished product resembles a whole turkey. Alternatively, the finished turducken can be a completely boneless roll with stuffing layered between each bird.

Stuffings may include cornbread dressing, sausage stuffing, oyster dressing, alligator, crawfish and shrimp. To serve, the roasted turducken is sliced crosswise so that servings consist of all the layers.

The idea for this multilayered, deboned fowl came from Louisiana where thousands of them are commercially prepared yearly. Turduckens are prepared in other States as well, and consumers also debone poultry and assemble them in home kitchens.

Critical control points involved in handling this risky assemblage are many, especially if the dish is made by a consumer and not in a USDA-inspected plant. Safe steps in food handling, cooking, and storage are essential to prevent foodborne illness. You can't see, smell, or taste harmful bacteria that may cause illness. In every step of food preparation, follow the four Fight BAC!® guidelines to keep food safe:

- Clean — Wash hands and surfaces often.
- Separate — Don't cross-contaminate.
- Cook — Cook to proper temperatures.
- Chill — Refrigerate promptly.

As when cooking any meat or poultry product, USDA strongly recommends using a food thermometer to ensure the turducken has reached a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F throughout the product. Here are specific recommendations from the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline for safely handling and cooking turduckens.

Safe Handling of Turducken Ingredients

- When creating a turducken at home, bring the raw birds directly home from the store and refrigerate (40 °F or below) immediately — within 2 hours (1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F).
- Make sure the raw poultry is wrapped securely and place it on a plate or casserole dish to prevent cross-contamination, or raw juices getting onto ready-to-eat food.
- Store the raw turkey, duck, and chicken no longer than 2 days before deboning, assembling and cooking.
- If the turducken has been purchased through mail order, make sure it arrives frozen with a cold source in an insulated carton. Transfer it immediately to the freezer. If the turducken arrives warm, notify the company. Do not use the product.

Creating a Turducken

- Before and after handling any raw meat or poultry, always wash hands in warm, soapy water for 20 seconds.

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- While handling and deboning the three birds, keep the raw poultry and their juices away from other food.
- Make the stuffing immediately before assembling the turducken.
- Make sure the birds and stuffing are not out of the refrigerator in the “Danger Zone” — between 40 and 140 °F — more than 2 hours while assembling the turducken.
- Pack the stuffing loosely, not too tightly, to promote efficient heat transfer during cooking.
- After cutting raw poultry, wash cutting board, knife, and counter tops with hot, soapy water.
- After washing, you may choose to sanitize cutting boards by using a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water.
- Another good and easy way to wash the cutting board is to run it through the dishwasher after use. Non-porous acrylic, plastic, glass and solid wood boards can be washed in a dishwasher (laminated boards may crack and split).
- When roasting a purchased USDA-inspected turducken, follow the package directions.
- When roasting a purchased frozen turducken without package directions, cook from the frozen state in an oven set no lower than 325 °F to a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F to ensure a safely cooked product.
- Use a food thermometer to ensure that all layers of the turducken and stuffing reach a minimum safe internal temperature of 165 °F. The thermometer should be placed at the center of the thickest part of the turducken to determine the safe internal temperature.
- Slice and serve the cooked turducken within 2 hours after cooking. If it is not intended to be served within 2 hours then slice and cut in smaller portions before putting in the refrigerator to cool fast. A whole cooked turducken may not cool to a safe temperature within the time needed to prevent bacterial growth.
- After slicing and serving the turducken, refrigerate any leftovers in a shallow container within 2 hours of cooking. Perishable food should not be left out more than 2 hours at room temperature (1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F).
- Use the leftovers within 3 to 4 days after cooking or freeze for longer storage.

Roasting the Turducken and Handling Leftovers

- For home-prepared turducken, roast immediately after assembly.
- Roast the turducken in an oven set no lower than 325 °F.

Food Safety Questions?

Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline

If you have a question about meat, poultry, or egg products, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll free at **1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)**; TTY: 1-800-256-7072.



The Hotline is open year-round Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET (English or Spanish). Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day. Check out the FSIS Web site at www.fsis.usda.gov.

Send E-mail questions to MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov.

Ask Karen!

FSIS' automated response system can provide food safety information 24/7



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