



PhotoDisc

## Turkey Basics: Handling Cooked Dinners

### Take-out Dinners Hot from the Oven

#### *Eating Within 2 hours?*

Pick up the food hot...and keep it hot. Keeping food warm is not enough. Harmful bacteria multiply fastest between 40 and 140 °F.

Set oven temperature high enough to keep the turkey at 140 °F or above. Use a food thermometer to check. Stuffing and side dishes must also stay hot (at 140 °F or above). Covering with foil will help keep the food moist.

#### *Eating Much Later?*

It's not a good idea to keep food hot longer than 2 hours. It is better if you:

- Remove all stuffing from the turkey cavity immediately and refrigerate it.
- Cut turkey into smaller pieces and refrigerate. Slice breast meat; legs and wings may be left whole.
- Refrigerate potatoes, gravy, and vegetables in shallow containers.

#### *Reheating?*

Reheat thoroughly to 165 °F or until hot and steaming. Bring gravy to a rolling boil.

In the microwave oven, cover food and rotate dish so it heats evenly. Follow the microwave manufacturer's instructions.

### Cooked and Refrigerated

#### *Keep Cold Food Cold*

Refrigerate cold food as soon as you get home (always within 2 hours). Serve your meal within 3 to 4 days.

**Reheating a Whole Turkey is NOT Recommended.** If you plan to reheat a turkey, cut the meat into smaller pieces. Slice breast meat. Legs and wings may be left whole. Refrigerate in shallow containers.

Exception: Cooked turkeys with the USDA inspection seal on the packaging have been processed under controlled conditions. Follow package directions for reheating and storing.

### Handling Leftovers

Perishable foods should not be left out of the refrigerator for more than 2 hours. Refrigerate or freeze leftovers promptly in shallow containers.

#### **Storage of Leftovers**

It IS safe to freeze leftover turkey and trimmings — even if you purchased them frozen. Wrap tightly for best quality.

#### **Refrigerator (40 °F or below)**

Cooked turkey	3 to 4 days
Cooked dishes and gravy	3 to 4 days

### Cooked Frozen Turkey; Side Dishes

#### *Is the USDA Inspection Seal Visible?*

This seal on the label tells you the turkey was prepared in a USDA-inspected plant. Read and follow package directions for thawing, reheating, and storing.

#### *No Handling Instructions on the Label?* Follow these steps:

- Thaw the wrapped, cooked, frozen turkey on a tray in the refrigerator. Allow about a day for every 4 to 5 pounds. Small packages such as stuffing, gravy, or potatoes will thaw in less time. Side dishes can go from the freezer to the oven.
- Once the cooked turkey thaws, eat it (either cold or reheated to 165 °F) within 3 to 4 days.
- To reheat turkey, cut the meat into small pieces. Slice the breast meat. Legs and wings may be left whole.

#### **Freezer (0 °F or below)**

Turkey, plain	4 mos.
slices or pieces	
Turkey covered with	6 mos.
broth or gravy	
Cooked poultry dishes,	4-6 mos.
stuffing, and gravy	

(Freezer storage times are for **quality only**. Frozen foods remain safe indefinitely.)



### Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)

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.

Send E-mail questions to [MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov](mailto:MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov).

### AskKaren.gov

For automated responses via the Internet 24 hours a day.

