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Thanksgiving Food Safety

The countdown to Thanksgiving is over, and the big day is finally here with the family on the way with growling tummies. You've been preparing all month, now it's time to safely handle and prepare your turkey and get cooking!

Wash Your Hands! One of the most important ingredients for a delicious and food safe Thanksgiving meal is clean hands. Wash your hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds throughout the cooking process, especially before handling food and after handling raw meat or poultry. This is one of the simplest and most effective ways to prevent the spread of bacteria. When there are multiple cooks in the kitchen make sure all the helpers wash their hands before touching the food.

Cross-Contamination: The Unwanted Guest The transfer of bacteria from one surface to another is known as cross-contamination. For example, if you touch the raw turkey and then go on to prepare a fresh salad without washing your hands, the bacteria from the turkey could be present on the salad and could make your family sick. Always separate raw turkey from ready-to-eat foods. By using separate cutting boards, plates and utensils when preparing and serving food will help you to avoid cross-contamination.

Another source of bacteria in your kitchen can be your dish towel. Kitchen towels can be a source of cross-contamination in the kitchen. They can build up bacteria after multiple uses and should be washed frequently in the hot cycle of your washing machine. If you want to avoid using up all of your nice kitchen towel on Thanksgiving, opt for using paper towels, but remember to only use them one time so that any bacteria go in the trash and not elsewhere.

Cooking Turkey like a PRO Cooking the Thanksgiving turkey can be tricky. Correct use of a metal stem thermometer is the key. You can impress your family by correctly using a metal stem thermometer and cook like a PRO: Place the thermometer, Read the temperature, Out of the oven!

Determine the temperature of the turkey by placing the thermometer in each of these three spots: the innermost part of the thigh, the innermost part of the wing and the thickest part of the breast.

Read the temperature to make sure that the bird has reached a minimum internal temperature of 165 F - it's the temperature that kills harmful pathogens like *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*.

Take the turkey out of the oven when it has reached a safe temperature and serve it to your family without worry.

What about leftovers? You may want to relax after an awesome meal, but it's important to remember to refrigerate any leftovers within two hours. Prompt storage can prevent the growth of bacteria that you cannot smell or taste, but can still make you sick.

Store your leftovers in shallow containers and cut turkey into smaller pieces to decrease cooling time. While you may have cooked the stuffing inside of your turkey, it should be stored separately from the turkey in a shallow container. Properly cooled leftovers are safe for at least 4 days (that's Monday!) and leftovers will be safe indefinitely if frozen and kept below 0 F.

(This material comes from the USDA. Go to: www.foodsafety.gov for additional information.)

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