



NEWS RELEASE

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Make Cooking Turkey a Family Affair

Families and friends will be gathering to celebrate Thanksgiving. Cooks will be heading to the kitchen to prepare bountiful meals. Have children help and start teaching them food safety basics.

Before meal preparation begins, you must shop for a turkey. If you shop ahead, you may want to purchase a frozen turkey. If you are purchasing a turkey within 1-2 days of cooking, then you can safely purchase a fresh turkey.

Frozen turkeys should be thawed prior to cooking. There are three safe ways to thaw a turkey: in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in the microwave oven. When thawing in the refrigerator, allow 24 hours of thawing time for every five pounds of turkey. When thawing in cold water, allow 30 minutes per pound and change the water every 30 minutes until the turkey is thawed. When thawing in the microwave, follow the manufacturer's instructions. Plan to cook the turkey immediately after thawing because some areas of the turkey may become warm and begin to cook during microwave thawing.

The safest way to cook stuffing is in a casserole, not inside a bird. Bake the casserole in an oven set no lower than 325°F until the internal temperature reaches at least 165° F on a food thermometer. If you cook a stuffed turkey, check the temperature of both the stuffing and the turkey. Continue cooking the turkey until the stuffing reaches 165°F. Do not remove the turkey from the oven until the stuffing reaches 165°F.

Thawing and stuffing a turkey safely are the first two basics. But cooking is the only way to destroy bacteria. The oven temperature must be set no lower than 325°F. Overnight cooking of a turkey at a low temperature can result in food borne illness.

The internal temperature, on a food thermometer, of a whole turkey must reach 180°F in the innermost part of the thigh. If the turkey has a "pop-up" temperature indicator, it is also recommended that a food thermometer be used to test the turkey in several places.

Using a food thermometer is easy enough that children can help. Insert the food thermometer into the turkey and children can read the temperature. But sure to get the turkey to a safe position on the stovetop or in the oven so nobody is burned from the hot cooking pan or juices.

Everyone who will help prepare the turkey and meal needs to begin with clean hands. After hand washing, children can help by gathering cooking pans and utensils and bringing food from the refrigerator to the counter. At this time, be sure that utensils, plates, work surfaces, etc., have been thoroughly cleaned.

Children can also help prepare a vegetable salad or butter the rolls. Be sure these foods are kept away from the raw turkey. Raw meat and poultry products may contain harmful bacteria, so it is important that the juices from raw meat and poultry products do not come into contact with food that will be consumed without cooking.

For additional information call the Meat and Poultry Hotline's toll-free number 1 (888) 674-6854.

Have a Happy Thanksgiving!

Source: Food Safety for Home Cooking E-mail Newsletter, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County,

<http://www.lancaster.unl.edu/foodsafety.htm>