

Turkey Tips



Whether you're a seasoned chef or a novice preparing your first holiday meal, make sure you know the safest ways to thaw, prepare, stuff and cook your turkey.

Holidays are times we share the kitchen with family and friends. Make it a goal this year to also share good food safety practices. CDC is a partner with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), which is responsible for the safety of meat and poultry. Here are simple tips that all cooks in the kitchen can follow this holiday season for cooking a delicious *and* safely prepared turkey.

Turkey Basics: Safely Thaw, Prepare, Stuff, and Cook

When preparing a turkey, be aware of the four main safety issues: thawing, preparing, stuffing, and cooking to the adequate temperature.

Food Thermometer Truths

- Always use a food thermometer to guarantee that foods are cooked to a safe-to-eat temperature.
- Some food thermometers must be calibrated to ensure that they read food temperature accurately. [Find out if your thermometer can be calibrated.](#)
- [Calibrate your food thermometer](#) by following these steps:
 1. Fill a pot with distilled water and bring to a rolling boil.
 2. Hold the thermometer probe in the boiling water for one minute. Do not let the probe touch the pot.
 3. After one minute, the thermometer should read between 210° and 214° F. If it does not, adjust the thermometer manually to 212° F. If the thermometer cannot be adjusted manually do not use it until it is serviced by a professional.

Did You Know?

- *Clostridium perfringens* is the second most common bacterial cause of food poisoning.
 - Outbreaks occur most often in November and December.
 - Meat and poultry accounted for 92% of outbreaks with an identified single food source.
- Refrigerate leftovers at 40°F or below as soon as possible and within two hours of preparation to prevent food poisoning.¹

Safe Thawing

Thawing turkeys must be kept at a safe temperature. The "danger zone" is between 40 and 140°F — the temperature range where foodborne bacteria multiply rapidly. While frozen, a turkey is safe indefinitely, but as

soon as it begins to thaw, bacteria that may have been present before freezing can begin to grow again, if it is in the "danger zone."

There are three safe ways to thaw food: in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in a microwave oven. For instructions, see "[Safe Methods for Thawing](#);" instructions are also available in [Spanish](#).

Safe Preparation

Bacteria present on raw poultry can contaminate your hands, utensils, and work surfaces as you prepare the turkey. If these areas are not cleaned thoroughly before working with other foods, bacteria from the raw poultry can then be transferred to other foods. After working with raw poultry, always wash your hands, utensils, and work surfaces before they touch other foods.

Safe Stuffing

For optimal safety and uniform doneness, cook the stuffing outside the turkey in a casserole dish. However, if you place stuffing inside the turkey, do so just before cooking, and use a food thermometer. Make sure the center of the stuffing reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F. Bacteria can survive in stuffing that has not reached 165°F, possibly resulting in foodborne illness. Follow the FSIS' steps to [safely prepare, cook, remove, and refrigerate stuffing](#); [Spanish language instructions](#) are available.

Safe Cooking

Set the oven temperature no lower than 325°F and be sure the turkey is completely thawed. Place turkey breast-side up on a flat wire rack in a shallow roasting pan 2 to 2-1/2 inches deep. Check the internal temperature at the center of the stuffing and meaty portion of the breast, thigh, and wing joint using a food thermometer. Cooking times will vary. The food thermometer must reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F. Let the turkey stand 20 minutes before removing all stuffing from the cavity and carving the meat. For more information on safe internal temperatures, visit [FoodSafety.gov's Safe Minimum Cooking Temperatures](#)