FAQ

What about turkey meat that looks pink after cooking?

The color of cooked meat and poultry is not always an indicator of doneness. Only a *properly-calibrated* thermometer can determine if the product is "done." Turkey can remain pink even after proper cooking. The color is generally the presence of myoglobin in the muscles (especially the legs), a natural chemical change during cooking, or chemicals added during processing (for example, smoked turkey meat is commonly pink).

How do I calibrate my thermometer?

Many metal-stem thermometers can be calibrated. To calibrate your thermometer, follow the directions that came with the thermometer, request our calibration fact sheet, or check our site: www.bfhd.wa.gov

What about stuffing the turkey?

Cooking a stuffed turkey is riskier than cooking one unstuffed. Here are a few tips to make stuffed turkeys safer:

1. Prepare stuffing right before you *loosely* stuff and bake the bird.
2. Check stuffing temperature before you remove it from the bird. *Stuffing should reach 165ºF or hotter.*
3. You may let the cooked bird "stand" for 20 minutes to let the juices set. Remove all stuffing immediately after the standing time.

What about deep-frying the turkey?

For deep-frying, an oil with a high smoke point (ex: peanut oil) is heated to 350ºF. ***Only smaller, unstuffed, completely-thawed birds should be deep-fried***. Allow between 3-5 minutes per pound cooking time. To determine doneness, remove the bird from the oil (draining the oil out of the cavity) and take the thigh temperature.

To read more about deep-frying as well as other ways to safely prepare turkeys: www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/index.asp

I cooked the giblet bag in the turkey! Can we eat them?

Yes—if the giblets were in a paper bag or a plastic bag that did not melt, they and the turkey should be safe to eat. If the giblets were in a plastic bag that melted, neither the turkey nor the giblets should be eaten!

How can I get it to cook faster?

Several factors can reduce the roasting time of a whole turkey:

- ☑ Use a dark roasting pan.
- ☑ Use a lid or oven cooking bag.
- ☑ Leave it unstuffed.
- ☑ Use a fresh or completely-thawed turkey.

Is a paper grocery bag okay for cooking?

No. Do not use grocery-store brown paper bags for cooking. They might cause a fire or the glues/dyes or recycled products might emit toxic fumes in the heat of the oven. Purchase oven-cooking bags.

Is it safe to cook a frozen turkey?

Yes, if you do not stuff the turkey. The cooking time will take at least 50% longer than recommended times for a fully-thawed turkey. Be sure the thigh temperature reaches 180ºF.

What about leftovers?

- ☑ Refrigerate foods in shallow, uncovered containers within 2 hours of cooking.
- ☑ Turkey (and other large pieces of meat) should be removed from the bone and cut into pieces for rapid cooling.
- ☑ Refrigerated leftovers should be used within 4 days (except for stuffing and gravy—use those within 2 days). Frozen leftovers should be good for 1 month.

For more information:

Benton-Franklin Health District
7102 W. Okanogan Pl.
Kennewick, WA 99336 (509) 460-4205
www.bfhd.wa.gov

Check our other brochures:

"Potluck Safety" "Facts About Foodborne Illness"
"Holiday Food Safety" "Facts About Salmonella"

Websites:

United States Department of Agriculture
www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/index.asp
National Turkey Federation
www.eatturkey.com

Phone numbers:

WSU Cooperative Extension
(509) 735-3551
USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline
1 (888) 674-6854

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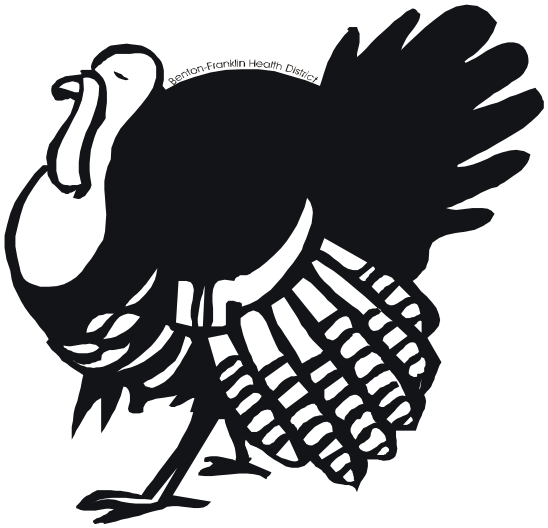
Turkey Safety

Seasonal Food Safety Series



www.bfhd.wa.gov

PUBLIC HEALTH
Prevent • Promote • Protect
BENTON-FRANKLIN HEALTH DISTRICT

Holidays often bring gatherings of family, friends, and food. While excessive eating at a meal can cause an upset stomach, so can eating food that was improperly handled. When you look around your holiday table this year, think about this... One of five of the people you see could be at risk for a serious foodborne illness, and they probably don't know it.

The people most at risk are: Young (younger than 8 years old); Old (past their 65th birthday); Pregnant; or Immune-compromised (with chronic illnesses like cancer, AIDS, diabetes, or on certain medications).

The discomfort from overeating should go away within a couple of hours, but an illness from mishandled food could last several days or longer. Here are some turkey tips to ensure your meal is a memorable one, but not because of a foodborne illness.

Plan

Size? If you are serving no other meats, buy 1 pound of turkey for each dinner guest.

Fresh or Frozen? There should be no quality difference between fresh or frozen turkeys. Frozen turkeys often cost less, but will require time to thaw. Fresh turkeys are ready to roast, but usually cost more than frozen turkeys and often require special order.

Storage? Clear a space in your refrigerator before you buy the bird. Protect your other foods from germs dripping from the raw turkey: keep the bird below all of your other foods and in a container that doesn't leak.

Shop? Stop at the grocery store last. Your turkey will need to get back into the refrigerator as soon as possible. You can safely keep a fresh or completely-thawed turkey in your refrigerator for up to 2 days.

Clean

As always, soap and water will be critical to food safety while preparing your turkey.

Carefully wash your hands before handling food and after handling raw meats, going to the bathroom, or caring for animals or children.

Germs from raw meat can spread easily! Wash utensils, food contact surfaces, and hands in hot, soapy water after they have touched raw meat, including turkey.

Thaw

The **safest** way to thaw a frozen turkey is in the refrigerator. Allow 6 hours for each pound of turkey. (A 16 pound turkey would take 4 days--refrigerate Sunday morning in order to thaw by Thursday.)

For **faster** thawing, thaw the turkey in a (clean) sink. Place the bagged turkey in the sink and cover with cold water. Change the water every 30 minutes to keep it cold. Allow at least 30 minutes per pound to defrost.

Small turkeys can also be defrosted in the microwave. Because the microwave actually begins the cooking process, start roasting the turkey immediately after pulling it out of the microwave.

Thawing at room temperature is not safe because bacteria that might be on the bird can multiply to high numbers that cooking may not destroy. Don't forget to remove the giblet bag before you cook.

Cook

There are several methods to cook a turkey. For best results while oven-roasting, set the oven at 325ºF or higher. (For other methods, call the health department or check one of the sources at the back of this brochure.) At this temperature, a 15 pound, unstuffed, thawed bird will take about 4 hours to cook.

Cooking at temperatures below 325ºF or partial cooking (stopping and finishing later) is not recommended. Both methods can give dangerous bacteria the time and temperatures needed to grow.

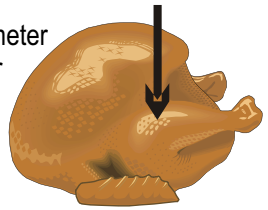
Done?

Using a thermometer is the safest method to see if the turkey is done. The turkey is thoroughly cooked when the temperature in the thigh reads 180ºF.

When the thigh has reached this temperature, there is usually no other site in the bird lower than the safe cooking temperature of 165ºF.

It is important to know which type of thermometer you are using. A standard meat thermometer is left in the meat during the entire baking process and an instant-read thermometer (also called a metal-stem thermometer) is used to take a product temperature when the food is out of the oven.

Regardless of the food thermometer you use, insert the thermometer in the thigh of the bird. Be sure to aim the thermometer toward the center of the bird, and avoid the thigh bone.



Once the turkey is done, it is safe to let the turkey "rest" for 20 minutes before carving. If you need more time before the meal will be served, keep the turkey warm in the oven.

If you also stuffed the bird, it is important to make sure the stuffing reaches 165ºF. Take the temperature in the center of the stuffing.

Turkey Words to Know:

Self-Basted--The turkey is commercially injected or marinated with an approved solution

Brining--treat with a strong solution of water and salt to make meat more tender and juicy

Free Range--poultry has been allowed access to the outdoors

Fresh--poultry has not been stored below 26ºF

Hen--Female turkey

Tom–Male turkey

Young--A male or female turkey usually under 8 months of age

Kosher--prepared under Rabbinical supervision

Natural--no artificial flavor, color, or preservative has been added (No hormones are FDA-approved for use on turkeys.)