



COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE • COMMUNITY HEALTH AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN NO. 21-06-DES

DISTRICT ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DIVISION

GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING A SAFE TURKEY

FROZEN TURKEYS

- Always keep your turkey frozen until ready to thaw for cooking. In the frozen state, the turkey should feel solid (rock hard) to the touch. A turkey can be stored in the freezer for up to 1 year.

FRESH TURKEYS

- Always refrigerate the turkey immediately after bringing it home. Cook within 1 to 2 days after purchase for optimal quality and safety.

THAWING

- Never thaw the turkey until you are ready to cook it and never thaw it at room temperature. Both of these practices promote bacterial growth that can reach dangerous levels. Instead, use the refrigerator or cold water to defrost the bird. You can use the following times frames as a guide.

1. Refrigerator - The safest way to thaw a turkey is in the refrigerator. Keep the bird in its original wrap and place on a tray or in a pan. Follow these thawing guidelines:

WHOLE TURKEY...

8-12 pounds ----- 1 to 2 days 16-20 pounds ----- 3 to 4 days
12- 16 pounds ----- 2 to 3 days 20-24 pounds ----- 4 to 5 days

PIECES OF WHOLE TURKEY...

Half, quarter, half breast ----- 1 to 2 days

2. In water - keep in original wrap and place in cold water (if wrapping is torn, place in another plastic bag and seal tightly). Change water every 30 minutes as a general rule. Follow these thawing guidelines:

WHOLE TURKEY...

8-12 pounds ----- 4 to 6 hours 16-20 pounds ----- 9 to 11 hours
12-16 pounds ----- 6 to 9 hours 20-24 pounds ----- 11 to 12 hours

After thawing, remove neck and giblets from both neck and body cavities. Wash turkey inside and out with cold water, drain well. A thawed turkey may remain in refrigerator 1-2 days.



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STUFFING

- Do not buy a pre-stuffed turkey.
- When preparing the turkey, be sure to practice proper hygiene. Wash hands, utensils, sink and anything else that has come in contact with the raw turkey. Wait to stuff the turkey until it is just about ready to go into the oven. The less the turkey is handled the better.

ROASTING

- Never partially cook a stuffed turkey one day and complete cooking the next. Bacterial growth could be enhanced.
- Always roast according to label instructions for temperature & time.
- Set the oven temperature at no lower than 325°F.
- Never cook at very low temperatures for prolonged periods of time. The meat may not reach a sufficient temperature to kill bacteria fast enough and could be unsafe to eat.
- Always remove stuffing as soon as the turkey is removed from the oven. Harmful bacteria may grow in the stuffing if it sits in the bird after it is cooked. For safety and doneness, the internal temperature as registered on a meat thermometer must reach a minimum of 180°F in the thigh before removing from the oven. The center of the stuffing should reach 165°F. The best method is to cook the stuffing separately from the bird.
- Juices should run clear.

CARVING

- Always use a clean surface and utensils when carving. Never reuse the same knife, other utensils, or cutting board that were used to prepare the raw turkey.

SERVING

- Never leave food out for prolonged periods of time. Food left out for more than 2 hours can result in food poisoning (even in heated serving units such as hot trays).
- Keep buffet servings small and refrigerate leftovers after meal is finished.

STORING LEFTOVERS

- De-bone turkey and refrigerate all leftovers within 2 hours of cooking.
- Divide large quantities into smaller portions and store in several small or shallow containers. This ensures food will get colder more quickly and bacteria are less likely to grow.
- Use leftover turkey and stuffing within 1-2 days. Reheat thoroughly to a temperature of 165°F hot and steaming.
- When freezing leftovers, always properly wrap and date packages. Use within one month.

For further information about food safety, call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline: (888) 674-6854 - 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Eastern time Monday through Friday

*Document available in an alternate format upon request