



Department of Health  
Agency of Human Services



## Kitchen Tips for a Happy, Food-Safe Thanksgiving

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BURLINGTON – Anyone who has ever roasted turkey (and all the trimmings) for a Thanksgiving celebration knows the responsibility can be daunting.

For the chef, knowing that all care has been taken to prepare foods in a way that keeps loved ones safe from foodborne illness is more important than the thanks and compliments.

“We want Vermonters to enjoy their holiday meal,” said Elisabeth Wirsing, food and lodging chief at the Vermont Department of Health, “and to be aware of the proper steps for thawing, stuffing, cooking and storing a turkey and other foods.”

### Prepare Food Safely –

**Wash your hands before handling any food** – especially after using the bathroom, changing diapers and handling pets. It is also important to wash your hands after handling raw foods.

- **Wash towels, sponges and dish cloths often** to halt bacterial growth. Replace sponges every few weeks. Always serve food on clean plates.
- **Avoid cross-contamination.** Keep raw meat, poultry, fish and their juices away from other foods, especially foods that will not be cooked. Wash your hands, cutting board, and utensils in hot soapy water after cutting raw poultry or other meat and before handling or cutting up other ingredients. Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly before preparing. Use separate cutting boards for meats and fruit or vegetables. Be sure to clean surfaces and utensils between preparations involving raw and cooked foods.
- **Cook foods to their proper temperature.** For whole turkeys, cook until the meat thermometer reads at least 165°F throughout the entire bird and stuffing. Bacteria can survive in poultry or stuffing that has not reached 165°F, and it may cause illness like salmonella. Re-heat leftovers to 165°F.
- **Refrigerate leftovers right away.** Don't leave any foods out for more than two hours. Place leftovers in shallow storage containers to refrigerate (40°F) or freeze (0°F).
- **After cooking, remove stuffing** from poultry or other meat and refrigerate stuffing and meat separately.

### Defrost Foods Safely –

- **Never defrost food at room temperature.**
- **The safest way to defrost a turkey is in the refrigerator** for about 24 hours for each 5 pounds of meat. Be sure to place a plate or container under the meat while it is defrosting, so that the juices won't contaminate other foods. Put the defrosting turkey on the bottom shelf of your refrigerator.
- **If you need to defrost more quickly, you can use cold water.** Keep the turkey in its unopened wrapper and cover with cold water in a container or sink. Change the water every 30 minutes to keep the surface cold. The estimated thawing time is 30 minutes per pound of meat. Cook the turkey immediately after it is thawed. Do not refreeze.

**For more information** on “Safe Food Handling for a Healthy Holiday” visit the Health Department website at [healthvermont.gov](http://healthvermont.gov).

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