



## Avoid Need for Speed This Thanksgiving

*Both on the road and in the kitchen*



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BURLINGTON – The Vermont Department of Health is advising Vermont cooks to avoid the need for speed this Thanksgiving. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has issued guidelines on how to cook a turkey outside of the oven, for those who want it done faster and easier using a brine or frying method, but the risk of foodborne illness remains the same.

“Many Vermonters are creative in the kitchen, and we advise them to slow down and prepare foods safely to avoid any chance of getting ill,” said Elisabeth Wirsing, food and lodging program chief. “No matter which method you choose to get your turkey to the table, use a food thermometer to make sure the turkey has reached the safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F.”

Poultry that is improperly handled or undercooked is a common source of foodborne illness. Young children, pregnant women, older adults, and people with weak immune systems are more at risk for food poisoning and should be especially careful.

Here are some steps that all cooks can follow to keep their food safe all year long.

### To prevent Foodborne Illness:

#### Keep It Clean

Wash your hands with soap and warm water before and after handling foods. Wash countertops, towels, and dish cloths often to prevent bacteria from growing. Also wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly.

#### Don't Cross-Contaminate

Keep raw meat, poultry, fish and their juices away from other foods. Wash your cutting board, and knives in hot soapy water after cutting raw turkey and before cutting up other ingredients. Use separate cutting boards for meats and raw vegetables.

#### Cook to Temperature

For whole turkeys, cook until the meat thermometer reads at least 165°F throughout the entire bird and stuffing. Turkey livers and other innards should also be cooked to at least 165°F. Bacteria can survive in poultry or stuffing that has not reached this temperature, and could cause illness like Salmonella. Re-heat leftovers to 165°F. Gravy and side dishes can be sources of illness as well, so pay attention to cooking all foods properly.

#### Keep Leftovers Cold

It's best to refrigerate leftovers right away – never leave them 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.

#### About Defrosting

Never defrost food at room temperature. Defrosting turkeys and other large, frozen meats is especially challenging for cooks. To defrost in the refrigerator, allow 24 hours for each 5 lbs. 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, and put the plate on the bottom shelf of your refrigerator.

If you need to defrost more quickly, you can use cold water. Keep the meat 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 1 lb. of meat.

Visit the Health Department website for more information on “**Food Safety Facts**” at [healthvermont.gov](http://healthvermont.gov).

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