



Department of Health  
Agency of Human Services



## Quick Tips for a Food Safe Thanksgiving



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BURLINGTON – Thanksgiving food, family and fun may start with a hundred items on your to-do list, but there are only four things you need to remember to guarantee a food safe holiday – CLEAN, SEPARATE, COOK, CHILL.

“Every year millions of people in the U.S. become ill, sometimes seriously, from foodborne illness,” said Elisabeth Wirsing, food and lodging chief at the Vermont Department of Health. Foodborne illness or “food poisoning” ranges from slight discomfort to serious infections that require hospitalization. Infants and young children, pregnant women and older adults are at greatest risk for serious complications or death.

“Raw poultry can contaminate everything it touches, and bacteria thrives in the “Danger Zone” between 40° and 140° Fahrenheit, when cooking temperatures are too low or food is left at room temperature for too long,” said Wirsing. “We can be thankful that it is easy to avoid the risk of illness.”

The Health Department recommends following these simple tips to help keep food safe throughout the entire meal, and in good shape for enjoying leftovers:

**CLEAN** – Wash hands, utensils and food preparation surfaces with hot soapy water after they touch raw meat or poultry

**SEPARATE** – Keep raw meats away from other foods

**COOK** – To the right internal temperature to kill harmful bacteria

**CHILL** – Refrigerate food within two hours

- Defrost turkeys in the refrigerator or in cold water. Allow 24 hours per five pounds in the refrigerator; allow 30 minutes per pound in cold water. Never thaw it out on the counter where the temperature can quickly move into the “danger zone”
- Cook turkeys to 165°F. Place a meat thermometer in the thickest part of the meat (Don’t let the thermometer touch bone when reading temperature)
- If the turkey is stuffed, the temperature of the stuffing should be 165°F
- Keep hot foods hot at 140°F or above (Table tip: Use chafing dishes or hot plates), or microwave to at least 165°F
- Keep cold foods cold at 40°F or below (Table tip: use ice)
- Refrigerate leftovers within two hours of serving
- Leftover turkey should be eaten within three to four days; gravy, stuffing and other sides within one to two days; and frozen leftovers within one month
- Reheat leftovers to 165°F—the food should be hot and steaming

See a temperature guide and more at [Holiday Food Safety](#).

Food Safety Tips for Your Holiday Turkey: <http://www.cdc.gov/features/turkeytime/>

More food safety and cooking tips: <https://www.foodsafety.gov/index.html>

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