

Thanksgiving - no food poisoning please!

Thanksgiving is a time for family gatherings and good times. Don't ruin it with food poisoning. Turkey, gravy and dressing are possible sources of food poisoning if they are not prepared or stored properly.

Always wash your hands before preparing food and between food item handling.

Thaw the turkey completely before beginning to cook. Thaw it in the refrigerator if possible. Use an oven temperature no lower than 325 F (163 C) and use a meat thermometer to be sure that the meat is thoroughly cooked. The innermost part of the thigh should read 180 F (82 C).



Dressing contains eggs which may contain Salmonella bacteria. If the dressing is not properly cooked, it can cause food poisoning. It is best to cook the dressing in a casserole dish on the side so that it cooks thoroughly rather than placing it inside the turkey where it is protected from heat. If you choose to stuff the dressing in the turkey, fill it loosely and cook until the temperature reaches at least 165 F (74 C).

If you purchase a turkey dinner from a restaurant, keep it hot. Keep it in the oven and hot enough to keep the temperature at 140 F until ready to serve. Keeping it warm is not enough to prevent bacterial growth. Use a meat thermometer to monitor the temperature. Cover foods with foil to keep them from drying out.

Preserve the remaining food in the refrigerator after the meal. Put it in shallow dishes so that it cools rapidly. Do not leave it on the counter top between eating the meal and making sandwiches later. Turkey, dressing and gravy are all good materials to support bacterial growth. Salmonella is not the only bacteria that can cause food poisoning. Staphylococcus (Staph) can also grow on cooked foods, produces toxins that cause illness as well.

It is easy to get food safety information 24/7 by phone or on the Internet. Cooks who prefer the personal touch can speak to a food safety specialist (English or Spanish) or hear food safety messages by calling the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll-free 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) or TTY: 1-800-256-7072. Or, they can receive a personal answer electronically by e-mailing a question to mp hotline.fsis@usda.gov. Publications can be printed from the FSIS Web site <http://www.fsis.usda.gov>.