

Play It Safe With Food

Tallahassee Democrat

Jo Shuford-Law, Extension Agent IV, Leon County Extension Service—Family & Consumer Sciences

So, it's the day before Thanksgiving and if turkey is on your menu it should be safely thawing in the refrigerator. Each Thanksgiving, more than 45 million turkeys are prepared and consumed in the U.S. The USDA recommends a few "turkey basics" to keep your family safe from food borne illnesses.

If you bought a fresh turkey, it must be cooked within two days. If you prefer the frozen bird, defrost it in the refrigerator. Expect defrosting to take about 24 hours for every five pounds. Another safe alternative for defrosting the frozen turkey is by placing it in cold water, but change the water every 30 minutes until it is thawed. Never thaw the turkey on the kitchen counter at room temperature. Once thawed, cook the bird immediately. Make sure to clean and sanitize the areas where raw turkey juice may have been.

What about the stuffing? Currently experts recommend that the safest way to cook stuffing is separate from the turkey. The stuffing must be cooked up to 165°F. Cook all foods to proper temperatures. Cooking food to proper temperatures can destroy harmful bacteria. Millions of people get sick from dangerous bacteria in food every year. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 76 million persons get sick, 325,000 are hospitalized and 5,000 die from foodborne infection and illness in the U.S. each year.

Many people don't link their illness to food borne bacteria. They think they have a case of the flu. You can become sick anytime from 20 minutes to 6 weeks after eating food with some types of harmful bacteria. For some people who are at high risk – young children, pregnant women, people over 65 and people with chronic illnesses – getting sick from food borne bacteria can cause serious health problems. Using a food thermometer is the only sure way of knowing if your food has reached a high enough temperature to destroy food borne bacteria.

Follow these guidelines to be sure that your food has reached a safe internal temperature.

<u>Food</u>	<u>Temperature °F</u>
Whole turkey, chicken	165°
Poultry breasts	165°
Poultry thighs	165°
Ham - fresh (raw)	160°
Ham - precooked (to reheat)	165°
Egg Dishes	160°
Casseroles/leftovers	165°

If you have any leftover turkey, cut it into small pieces and store it in the refrigerator within 2 hours. Use the left over turkey and stuffing within 3-4 days.

Dr. Amy Simonne, UF-Extension, Food Safety & Quality Specialist, states that "while you want your family feasts to be memorable, using precautions to keep your family safe from food borne illness will help make sure they're feasts to remember for the right reasons."

The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service ([www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)) provides consumers with key recommendations they can use to help reduce the risk of food borne illness during the Thanksgiving holiday. Don't forget the Meat and Poultry Hotline (now in its 21<sup>st</sup> year) is staffed Monday through Friday 10 am to 4 pm ET year-round. It is available from 8 am to 2 pm ET on Thanksgiving Day.

Call: 1-888-MPHotline or 1-888-674-6854. To reach 24 hour service contact the virtual representative, *Karen* at [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food\\_Safety\\_Education/ASK\\_KAREN/index.asp#Question](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education/ASK_KAREN/index.asp#Question) Information is available in English and Spanish.

Other helpful websites include:

[www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)

<http://www.fda.gov/consumer/updates/foodsafetytips111307.html>

If you have a question, write to Jo Shuford-Law, Extension Agent Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Florida/IFAS Extension--Leon County, 615 Paul Russell Road, Tallahassee, FL 32301-7099; or call the Extension Office 487-3006, between 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays.

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