

Quick Tips for Thanksgiving Food Safety

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Thanksgiving is a time for families to gather and enjoy each other - not suffer from food poisoning! Here are quick tips to keep your family healthy:

- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends thawing the turkey in the refrigerator. It takes 24 hours for every 4-5 pounds of turkey, not including the day you cook it. A 20 to 24-pound turkey would take about 5-6 days to thaw.
- For optimum food safety, do not stuff your turkey. Place stuffing in a separate baking dish to cook.
- USDA recommends an oven temperature no lower than 325°F for cooking a turkey along with using a food thermometer to make sure the thickest part of the turkey reads 165°F. A 20 to 24-pound turkey may take about 5 hours to cook.
- Avoid cross-contamination by using separate cutting boards, plates, and utensils when handling raw turkey. Wash items that have touched raw meat with warm soap and water or place them in a dishwasher.
- Refrigerate leftovers within two hours to prevent bacteria from growing on the food. Eat leftovers within 3-4 days. Use the freezer to store leftovers for longer periods.
- Do not overfill your refrigerator. This causes it to work hard and may not keep food at 40°F or below.

Sources:

1. Thanksgiving Central, NE Extension: <https://go.unl.edu/thanksgiving-central>
2. Let's Talk Turkey, FSIS and USDA: <https://go.unl.edu/fsvr>
3. Thanksgiving, Foodsafety.gov: <https://go.unl.edu/zpac>

This newsletter was peer-reviewed and updated in 2025.

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<http://go.unl.edu/familyrun>



Healthy Holiday Safety Tips

- Clean out your refrigerator the week before an event to make room for thawing items and storing leftovers.
- Use a refrigerator thermometer to check that your refrigerator is 40°F or below.
- Frequently wash your hands with water and soap for 20 seconds.
- Simplify the day by preparing food the day before.
- Do not prepare food when you are ill.
- Use a calibrated food thermometer for cooking.
- Store leftovers in shallow containers to decrease cooling time. This prevents food from spending too much time at unsafe temperatures.
- Keep leftovers in a cooler with ice or frozen gel packs if the food is traveling home with a guest who lives more than two hours away.