

## Holiday Food Safety Information

### Introduction

Keep the holidays happy and healthy by making sure you and others don't get food related sickness (known as "foodborne illness"). This handout lists simple food safety guidelines to follow this holiday season, and beyond. Food safety is especially important for those who are more likely to get sick, such as children, the elderly, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems or "immunocompromised."



The leading cause of foodborne illness is eating fresh/unpreserved food that has been in the temperature range between 40°F and 140°F for more than two hours. This range is called the "danger zone" because bacteria can grow very rapidly at these temperatures. To help prevent foodborne illness, it is important to keep hot foods at 140°F or higher and cold foods at 40°F or lower, until you are ready to eat.

### Meal safety during the holidays

**Buffets and potlucks:** At events such as buffets or potlucks where food is set out for guests, avoid adding a fresh batch of food to bowls or platters that have been sitting out. Prepare food in small platters and dishes ahead of time, then set a fresh dish out once a previous dish is empty. For added safety, put cold foods on ice and hot foods over a heat source to keep them out of the danger zone and at a safe temperature.

**Late arriving guests:** Do not let any cooked food, meat, or poultry stay in the danger zone for over two hours. Keep hot foods at safely in the oven between 200°F to 250°F until guests arrive. Place a food thermometer in the thickest part of the roast or poultry, or in the center of a casserole to measure the internal temperature. Adjust the oven to keep food at an internal temperature of 140°F or higher. To prevent dryness in the oven, cover the food with a lid or aluminum foil.

**Handling take-out foods:** Bring take-out food home immediately and do not leave take-out foods in the danger zone longer than two hours. Refrigerate cold foods at 40°F or lower until you are ready to eat. If the food is hot and will not be eaten within two hours, keep it at 140°F or above in a 200°F to 250°F oven. If hot foods are being picked up two hours or more in advance, refrigerate them. If not eating hot foods immediately, cool them quickly to below 40°F. See "Storing leftovers" on page 5, for guidelines on handling "thicker" foods, such as stews and layers of meat slices, so they cool faster to a safe temperature.

**Traveling safely with food:** Always consider the amount of travel time when traveling with food or if asking guests to bring food. Cold foods should not be out of refrigeration for over two hours (including the time during serving). Hot foods must be kept hot. Ask people who are traveling a long distance to bring non-perishables (such as rolls, breads, and cookies). Those traveling an hour or less can more safely bring perishable foods. Wrap hot foods in foil and towels to keep them warm. Place cold foods in a cooler with ice or gel packs. Plan to serve foods shortly after guests have arrived.

**Refrigerate pumpkin pie:** Bacteria grow in moist foods that contain eggs and milk, such as custard and pumpkin pie. Always keep these foods refrigerated and do not leave them in the danger zone longer than two hours.

**Avoid raw cookie dough:** Do not eat raw cookie dough; it is best to wait until the cookies are baked. Uncooked eggs and flour in cookie dough can have harmful bacteria, (such as Salmonella and E-coli).

## **Turkey preparation and cooking**

### **Thawing a turkey**

- 1.** Wash your hands, utensils, and all work areas with hot soapy water before and after handling the raw turkey.
- 2.** Do not thaw turkey at room temperature, instead read the table on page 3 for thawing options.
- 3.** After thawing remove the bag of giblets from inside the turkey and cook the giblets separate from the whole bird.
- 4.** Season as desired and place directly in roasting pan. Cook immediately after thawing.
- 5.** After washing your hands again, disinfect all surfaces where the raw turkey was with a bleach solution (we recommend: 4 teaspoons unscented household bleach mixed with 4 cups of water).

<b>*Thawing time in the refrigerator (40°F) (whole turkey)</b>	<b>**Thawing time in <u>cold</u> water (whole turkey submerged)</b>	<b>Thawing time in the microwave: (Not recommended due to possible bacterial growth)</b>
24 hours per 5 pounds	30 minutes per pound turkey	
8 to 12 pounds: 2 to 3 days	8 to 12 pounds: 4 to 6 hours	Check manufacturer’s instructions for the turkey size that will fit into your oven, the minutes per pound, and the power level to use for thawing. Remove all wrapping. Place on a microwave-safe dish to catch juices. Plan to cook the turkey <i>immediately</i> after thawing since some parts will become heated to the “danger zone,” allowing bacterial growth.
12 to 16 pounds: 3 to 4 days	12 to 16 pounds: 6 to 8 hours	
16 to 20 pounds: 4 to 5 days	16 to 20 pounds: 8 to 10 hours	
20 to 24 pounds: 5 to 6 days	20 to 24 pounds: 10 to 12 hours	

\*Thaw in a large pan to catch drips (preferably on the bottom refrigerator shelf).

\*\*Wrap turkey securely so that water cannot leak through the wrapping. Change the water every 30 minutes.

### Stuffing a turkey

Recommendations for immunosuppressed individuals: bake the stuffing in a separate dish at 325°F instead of inside the turkey. The stuffing is done cooking once the internal temperature is 165°F or more. For gatherings away from home, ask the host to set aside a portion of stuffing cooked using these recommendations.

<b>Stuffing in the turkey*</b>	<b>Stuffing separate</b>
Mix dressing and stuffing ingredients immediately before putting in the oven. Stuff turkey lightly. Allow 3/4 cup stuffing per pound of turkey.	Bake stuffing in a greased, covered casserole dish during the last hour that the turkey roasts (leave covered during the first half of baking time; uncover during the second half of baking time).
The internal temperature of the stuffing must reach 165°F (check temperature with food thermometer).	Bake until stuffing reaches 165°F (check temperature with food thermometer).

\*Stuffing in the turkeys: After removing the turkey from the oven, immediately remove the stuffing. If the turkey is done baking before the stuffing reaches 165°F, remove the stuffing and finish baking in a separate casserole dish until it reaches 165°F.

## Baking a turkey

1. Preheat your oven to a temperature of 325°F.
2. Once your oven is heated, place the turkey breast-side-up on a rack in a shallow roasting pan. Insert an oven/heat resistant food thermometer into the inner part of the thigh (not touching the bone).
3. For easier cleanup, add ½ cup of water to the bottom of the roasting pan.
4. Use the table below to determine how long to cook your turkey.
5. An aluminum foil tent may be placed loosely over the turkey for the first 1 to 1½ hours of baking, and then removed for browning.
6. At the end of the cooking time, use a food thermometer and confirm that each of the recommended temperatures is attained: 170°F in breast, 180°F in thigh, and 165°F in stuffing. Juices should be clear, not pink. Do not rely on a pop-up thermometer.
7. When the turkey is done, remove all stuffing. Set the bird out of the oven for 20 minutes for easier carving and juicier meat. Keep the rest of the turkey and stuffing hot in the oven set at 250°F.



Weight (pounds)	Conventional oven unstuffed (hours)	Conventional oven stuffed (hours)
4 to 6 (breast)	1½ to 2 ¼	Not Applicable
6 to 8 (breast)	2 ¼ to 3 ¼	Not Applicable
8 to 12	2 ¾ to 3	3 to 3 ½
12 to 14	3 to 3 ¾	3 ½ to 4
14 to 18	3 ¾ to 4 ¼	4 to 4 ¼
18 to 20	4 ¼ to 4 ½	4 ¼ to 4 ¾
20 to 24	4 ½ to 5	4 ¾ to 5 ¼
24 to 30	5 to 5 ¼	5 ¼ to 6 ¼

## Storing leftovers

Throw out any turkey, stuffing, and gravy left at room temperature longer than two hours. Store meat, stuffing, and gravy in separate containers. Follow the same guidelines for foods cooked ahead of time which will be reheated later.

- Refrigerate leftover foods in shallow uncovered containers to allow heat to escape so the food will cool more quickly. Stir the refrigerated food occasionally to help it cool using a clean spoon each time. Cover tightly when cooled.
- Stuffing should be removed from inside the turkey before serving and leftover turkey should be removed from the bones.
- Store thicker foods (such as stews, dressing, gravy, hot puddings, and layers of meat slices) in containers no taller than two inches.
- Turkey and stuffing will keep up to four days in the refrigerator. Use gravy within three to four days. These items may be frozen for up to six months.
- Before serving leftover sauces, soups, and gravies, heat them up until they start to boil. Heat other leftovers to an internal temperature of 165°F in the oven, set no lower than 325°F.



## Food safety resources

These hotlines and websites offer advice and/or answer questions on food safety as well as providing general and holiday cooking tips and recipes. When accessing and using the guidelines and recipes from the listed resources, still be aware of and use the general food safety and diet principles recommended for immunosuppressed individuals. Most of these companies are closed on major holidays. All listed times below are Pacific Standard Time.

- **U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Meat and Poultry Hot Line:** 1-888-674-6854, automated service is available 24 hours a day. [fsis.usda.gov](https://www.fsis.usda.gov)
- **National Turkey Federation:** Information on turkey, food safety and recipes. [eatturkey.org](https://eatturkey.org)
- **Butterball Turkey Talk-Line:** 1-800-288-8372 (option 4). [butterball.com](https://butterball.com)
- **Empire Kosher Poultry Hot Line:** 1-800-367-4734, year-round hours: Monday-Thursday 6 am – 2 pm; Friday: 6 am – 10 am. [empirekosher.com](https://empirekosher.com)
- **Ocean Spray Consumer Help Line:** 1-800-662-3263, year-round hours: 6 am – 3 pm; closed on major holidays. [oceanspray.com](https://oceanspray.com)
- **Fleischmann's Yeast:** 1-800-777-4959, Monday – Friday 7 am – 2 pm. [fleischmannsyeast.com](https://fleischmannsyeast.com)
- **Land O'Lakes:** 1-800-328-4155, Monday: 7 am – 1:30 pm, Tuesday – Friday: 6 am – 1:30 pm. [landolakes.com](https://landolakes.com)
- **Very Best Baking by Nestlé:** Baking tips and techniques: 1-800-637-8537 Monday-Friday: 6 am-3 pm. [verybestbaking.com](https://verybestbaking.com)
- **Betty Crocker:** 1-800-446-1898, Monday – Friday 5:30 am – 3:30 pm. [bettycrocker.com](https://bettycrocker.com)

## To schedule a nutrition consultation

For information about how to schedule a nutrition consultation, please call your Team Coordinator. Questions? Contact a Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center dietitian at [nutrition@seattlecca.org](mailto:nutrition@seattlecca.org)