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NEWS RELEASE

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Let's Talk Turkey - Public Health Provides Thanksgiving Food Safety Tips

Many throughout our community will be preparing a Thanksgiving meal this week and Public Health encourages everyone to practice food safety to ensure you have a safe and healthy holiday feast. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that foodborne illness results in roughly 48 million people getting sick, 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths in the U.S. annually. Poultry, including turkey, contains harmful pathogens such as Salmonella and Campylobacter that can lead to serious foodborne illness.

Public Health offers our top five tips to those preparing Thanksgiving meals:

Tip 1: Use the refrigerator, the cold-water method or the microwave to defrost a frozen turkey.

There are three safe ways to defrost a turkey: in the refrigerator, in cold water and in the microwave. Thawing food in the refrigerator is the safest method because the turkey will defrost at a consistent, safe temperature. To thaw in cold water, submerge the bird in its original wrapper in cold tap water, changing the water every 30 minutes. For instructions on microwave defrosting, refer to your microwave's owner's manual. Cold water and microwave thawing can also be used if your bird did not entirely defrost in the refrigerator.

Tip 2: Wash your hands, but not your turkey.

Washing your hands before cooking is the simplest way to stop the spread of bacteria. The USDA advises NOT to wash your turkey, as it is the easiest way to spread bacteria all over your kitchen. Cooking (baking, broiling, boiling, frying or grilling) meat and poultry to the right temperature kills any bacteria that may be present, so washing meat and poultry is not necessary.

Tip 3: Stuffing the turkey is NOT advised.

Even if the turkey is cooked to the correct internal temperature, the stuffing inside may not have reached a temperature high enough to kill the bacteria. If you still choose to stuff the turkey, stuff the bird just before placing in a pre-heated oven. All of the stuffing needs to be removed from the bird immediately after removing from the oven. Any stuffing that will not be served must be put into the refrigerator.

Tip 4: Use a meat thermometer.

To avoid foodborne illness, make sure the turkey is cooked to 165°F as measured by a food thermometer. The bird's temperature should be taken in three areas — the thickest part of the breast, the innermost part of the wing and the innermost part of the thigh.

Tip 5: Follow the two-hour rule for leftovers.

Any meat, stuffing or other perishable foods should not be left on the table or countertops for longer than two hours. After two hours, bacteria can rapidly multiply, and if eaten, could make you sick. Leftovers should stay safe in the refrigerator for four days and need to be reheated to a minimum of 165°F prior to consuming.

If you have questions about your Thanksgiving dinner, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) to talk to a food safety expert. Visit [FoodSafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) to learn more about how to safely select, thaw and prepare a turkey.