

Let's Talk Turkey

It's that time of year again when our thoughts turn to family, friends and of course the traditional turkey dinner over the holidays. Soon many of us will be preparing this meal and not thinking of the symptoms of diarrhea, cramps and nausea, which are indicative of food poisoning. However, each year many people become ill with salmonella and other types of food poisoning by eating improperly prepared or cooked poultry. Did you know that there are more than 2000 different types of salmonella bacteria, each causing similar symptoms? The intensity of these symptoms will vary according to the amount of bacteria consumed and the individual's susceptibility, but **ALL salmonella food poisoning is preventable by observing the following basic rules:**

1. Always cover fresh turkey with wax paper, plastic wrap or aluminum foil, place it in a pan or on a tray to catch the drips and store it at the bottom of the refrigerator. Fresh meat like turkey should be cooked within 2-3 days of purchase.
2. If you are using a frozen turkey thaw it in the refrigerator in a pan on the bottom shelf. It takes about 10 hours/kg or 5 hours/lb to thaw meat, so ensure you budget enough time for safe thawing.
3. In order to keep food free from contamination, be sure to wash your hands frequently and disinfect food contact surfaces like cutting boards and knives between each individual use.
4. Temperature abuse is the main culprit of food poisonings. Temperature abuse refers to allowing a hazardous food such as turkey to stay in the "DANGER ZONE" too long. The danger zone is temperatures between 4°C/40°F refrigeration and 60°C/140°F (hot holding). Bacteria can multiply to dangerous levels if held between these temperatures for prolonged periods of time.
5. Cooking turkey at temperatures less than 162°C/325°F is dangerous because it allows the inside of the turkey to remain at an unsafe temperature for too long.
6. For this reason low temperature, long time cooking is not recommended. A meat thermometer, inserted into the thigh muscle, is essential in determining the final internal cooking temperature which should read 82°C/180°F or higher for at least 15 seconds.
7. Due to the length of time it takes for the heat to penetrate the centre of the turkey and the subsequent potential for food poisoning organism growth, it is recommended that the dressing be cooked outside the bird.
8. Although the use of a meat thermometer is the only way to ensure a properly cooked bird, the following cooking times can be used as long as no red or pink colour remains and the juice runs clear.

FACT SHEET

HOURS OF ROASTING NEEDED

For Cooking a Thawed, Un-stuffed Bird at 162°C (325°F)

WEIGHT	TIME (hours)
3 to 3.5kg (6-8lbs)	2 ½ to 2 ¾
3.5 to 4.5kg (8-10lbs)	2 ¾ to 3
4.5 to 5.5kg (10-12lbs)	3 to 3 ¼
5.5 to 7kg (12-16lbs)	3 ¼ to 3 ½
7 to 10kg (16-22lbs)	3 ½ to 4

- Leftover turkey, stuffing and gravy should be handled with the same care and respect for temperature control. The temperature of these products should be reduced to 4°C or lower as soon as possible after the meal.