

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

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Keep your family safe from food-borne illness

This holiday season, keep your family healthy and your feast free of food-borne illnesses by remembering safe food handling practices, from grocery store shopping to storing leftovers.

At the grocery store:

- Double check the “best before” date to ensure freshness of all foods.
- Place the turkey at the bottom of the cart away from other food.
- Ask for the turkey to be bagged separately from all other food.
- Keep the turkey separate from other bags when transporting from store to home.

Pre-cooking storage:

- Refrigerate your turkey immediately upon arriving home from the grocery store if you will be cooking it within three days.
- Prevent raw turkey or turkey juices from contaminating other items in your fridge or freezer by storing it in a clean plastic container or plastic bag that will hold in any leaking juices or place the turkey on a deep tray to catch any leaking juices. Always place the turkey on the bottom shelf of the fridge or freezer.

Thawing:

- It is always best to thaw your turkey in the fridge. You can alternatively thaw your turkey in a sink, under cold running water, ensuring the turkey remains in its original plastic wrap and the water remains cold.
- Do not thaw turkey at room temperature. It is not safe and could result in the growth of dangerous bacteria.
- Cook your turkey immediately after it has thawed.

Preparation:

- If you are feeling unwell and experiencing symptoms of illness such as vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, fever, do not handle food or prepare food for others.
- To minimize the spreading of raw meat juice and to prevent cross contamination, it is not recommended to wash/rinse the turkey before cooking.
- Hand hygiene is important. Always wash your hands before preparing food, after handling raw meat and before moving on to another task/step.
- Use separate cutting boards to prevent cross contamination. Prepare ready-to-eat foods (e.g. salad) first before handling the raw turkey.
- Wash counters with soapy water then sanitize after handling raw meat. Use bleach solution to sanitize food contact surfaces (one teaspoon regular unscented bleach in one litre of water).

Cooking:

- Turkey must be cooked thoroughly, in the oven, until the meat reaches a minimum internal temperature of 82 degrees C or 180 degrees F.
- To ensure the turkey is properly cooked, always use a meat thermometer according to the manufacturer's instructions. Insert the thermometer into the thickest part of the thigh and/or breast, ensuring it is not touching any bones.
- Never slow cook a turkey.
- Prepare and cook stuffing separately from the turkey.

Serving:

- Keep hot food hot: hot foods should be kept at a temperature of at least 60 degrees C or 140 degrees F.
- Keep cold food cold: cold foods should be kept at a temperature of 4 degrees C or 40 degrees F or lower.
- Do not serve food that has been sitting at room temperature for more than two hours.

Leftovers:

- Refrigerate all leftovers within two hours of serving. Slice, quarter or debone the turkey to allow for faster cooling.
- Leftovers should be reheated to at least 74 degrees C or 165 degrees F.
- Leftover meat, stuffing or gravy should be eaten within two or three days of cooking. Any food that will not be eaten within three days should be immediately frozen after cooking.