

FEATURE – TURKEY BASICS FROM USDA’S BE FOOD SAFE CAMPAIGN

INTRO: The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s “Be Food Safe” message is important when preparing the traditional turkey dinner. USDA’s Patrick O’Leary has more. (1:59)

THE USDA’S MEAT & POULTRY HOTLINE CALLS THEM “TURKEY BASICS” – THE EXPERT’S GUIDELINES FOR SAFELY STORING, HANDLING AND PREPARING THE HOLIDAY BIRD, AND AVOIDING FOODBORNE ILLNESS.

Kathy Bernard, USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline: We get a lot of calls around the holidays because people are preparing turkeys, either for the first time or for a larger group than usual. So we give them the basics, which begin with Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill. Keep hands and utensils clean; separate raw from cooked foods; cook to a safe temperature and chill leftovers promptly.

A FRESH TURKEY WILL STAY SAFE IN THE FRIDGE FOR ONE TO TWO DAYS. A FROZEN TURKEY SHOULD BE STORED IN THE FREEZER UNTIL IT’S TIME TO THAW.

Bernard: The best way to thaw a frozen turkey is in the refrigerator. It’ll take about 24 hours for every 4- 5 pounds of bird. You can speed the thawing by placing the wrapped turkey in a sink of cold water, changing the water every 30 minutes. You can thaw a smaller turkey in the microwave oven, but then you should cook the turkey immediately after thawing because some areas do start to cook during the defrost process.

SET THE OVEN NO LOWER THAN 325 DEGREES, AND HAVE YOUR FOOD THERMOMETER HANDY.

Bernard: Thorough cooking will destroy any harmful bacteria that might be in the turkey, or the stuffing.

THE SAFEST WAY TO COOK STUFFING IS OUTSIDE THE BIRD.

Bernard: We recommend cooking stuffing in a casserole at 325 degrees, until the internal temperature reaches at least 165 degrees F as measured with a food thermometer.

IF YOU DECIDE TO STUFF THE TURKEY, STUFF IT LOOSELY AND CHECK THE TEMPERATURE OF THE STUFFING AND THE TURKEY WITH A FOOD THERMOMETER.

Bernard: Make sure the turkey reaches an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit by checking the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. The stuffing should also reach 165 degrees F.

THE FINISHED TURKEY SHOULD SIT OUT NO LONGER THAN TWO HOURS. REFRIGERATE LEFTOVERS PROMPTLY IN SHALLOW CONTAINERS. FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL THE USDA’S MEAT & POULTRY HOTLINE AT

1-888-MPHOLTINE. OR ASK A FOOD SAFETY QUESTION AT ASKKAREN.GOV.
FOR THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M PAT O'LEARY.