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Celebrate Thanksgiving Safely — Advice from Darien Health Department

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Some advice on keeping your Thanksgiving food healthy — information passed on by Mindy Chambrelli, a registered sanitarian at Darien Health Department:

Last year, more than 46 million turkeys were carved and eaten at Thanksgiving. Turkey is typically accompanied by a host of side dishes and desserts, making the Thanksgiving meal *by far* one of the largest meals most people will cook all year. Please do so safely and remember *NO need* to wash the bird, place it directly into the roasting pan!

- Allow 1 pound of turkey per person.
- Buy your turkey only 1 to 2 days before you plan to cook it.
- Keep it stored in the refrigerator until you're ready to cook it. Place it on a tray or in a pan to catch any juices that may leak.
- **Do not buy fresh pre-stuffed turkeys.** If not handled properly, any harmful bacteria that may be in the stuffing can multiply very quickly.

Frozen Turkeys

- Allow 1 pound of turkey per person.
- Keep frozen until you're ready to thaw it.
- Turkeys can be kept frozen in the freezer indefinitely; however, cook within 1 year for best quality.
- See "Thawing Your Turkey" for thawing instructions.

Thawing Your Turkey: There are three ways to thaw your turkey safely — *in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave oven.*

In the Refrigerator (40 °F or below)

Allow approximately 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds

4 to 12 pounds	1 to 3 days
12 to 16 pounds	3 to 4 days
16 to 20 pounds	4 to 5 days
20 to 24 pounds	5 to 6 days

Keep the turkey in its original wrapper. Place it on a tray or in a pan to catch any juices that may leak. A thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator for 1 to 2 days. If necessary, a turkey that has been properly thawed in the refrigerator may be refrozen.

In Cold Water

Allow approximately 30 minutes per pound

4 to 12 pounds	2 to 6 hours
12 to 16 pounds	6 to 8 hours
16 to 20 pounds	8 to 10 hours
20 to 24 pounds	10 to 12 hours

Wrap your turkey securely, making sure the water is not able to leak through the wrapping. Submerge your wrapped turkey in cold tap water. Change the water every 30 minutes. Cook the turkey immediately after it is thawed. Do not refreeze.

REMINDER: Remove the giblets from the turkey cavities after thawing. Cook separately.

Roasting Your Turkey

- Set your oven temperature no lower than 325 °F.
- Place your turkey or turkey breast on a rack in a shallow roasting pan.
- For optimum safety, stuffing a turkey is not recommended. For more even cooking, it is recommended you cook your stuffing outside the bird in a casserole. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the stuffing. The stuffing must reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F.
- **If you choose to stuff your turkey**, the ingredients can be prepared ahead of time; however, keep wet and dry ingredients separate. Chill all of the wet ingredients (butter/margarine, cooked celery and onions, broth, etc.). Mix wet and dry ingredients just before filling the turkey cavities. Fill the cavities loosely. Cook the turkey immediately. Use a food thermometer to make sure the center of the stuffing reaches a **safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F**.
- A whole turkey is safe when cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165 °F as measured with a food thermometer. **Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast.** For reasons of personal preference, consumers may choose to cook turkey to higher temperatures.
- If your turkey has a "pop-up" temperature indicator, it is recommended that you also check the internal temperature of the turkey in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast with a food thermometer. The minimum internal temperature should reach 165 °F for safety.
- For quality, let the turkey stand for 20 minutes before carving to allow juices to set. The turkey will carve more easily.

- Remove all stuffing from the turkey cavities.

Timetables for Turkey Roasting

(325 °F oven temperature)

Use the timetables below to determine how long to cook your turkey. These times are approximate. Always use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of your turkey and stuffing.

Unstuffed:

4 to 8 pounds (breast)	1½ to 3¼ hours
8 to 12 pounds	2¾ to 3 hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 to 3¾ hours
14 to 18 pounds	3¾ to 4¼ hours
18 to 20 pounds	4¼ to 4½ hours
20 to 24 pounds	4½ to 5 hours

Stuffed:

4 to 6 pounds (breast)	Not usually applicable
6 to 8 pounds (breast)	2½ to 3½ hours
8 to 12 pounds	3 to 3½ hours

12 to 14 pounds

3½ to 4 hours

14 to 18 pounds

4 to 4¼ hours

18 to 20 pounds

4¼ to 4¾ hours

20 to 24 pounds

4¾ to 5¼ hours

REMEMBER! Always wash hands, utensils, the sink, and anything else that comes in contact with raw turkey and its juices with soap and water.

Storing Your Leftovers:

- Discard any turkey, stuffing, and gravy left out at room temperature longer than 2 hours; 1 hour in temperatures above 90 °F.
- Divide leftovers into smaller portions. Refrigerate or freeze in covered shallow containers for quicker cooling.
- Use refrigerated turkey, stuffing, and gravy within 3 to 4 days.
- If freezing leftovers, use within 2 to 6 months for best quality.

If you have questions about roasting your turkey, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854), or chat live with a food safety specialist at [AskKaren.gov](https://www.askskaren.gov)

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, available from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. ET, Monday through Friday, in English or Spanish.

Have a happy and healthy Thanksgiving!

— [Some of this information](#) comes from the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture