

# Safe Turkey Handling Tips

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Low in fat and cholesterol, turkey is a healthful food choice for the holidays. But if improperly handled, it can become a breeding ground for bacteria that cause food-borne illness.

"Salmonella bacteria sometimes are present in small numbers in all raw animal products, such as poultry, eggs, meat and dairy products," says Dr. Stephen Knabel, assistant professor of food science in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences. "If properly handled and prepared, these foods are safe to eat."

"Illness due to Salmonella and other microorganisms found on raw poultry can be prevented since the bacteria can be killed easily by heat," he says. "To prepare turkey safely, follow a few common-sense procedures."

• Always thaw a frozen turkey in the refrigerator, not on the countertop. Harmful bacteria can multiply once the exterior of the bird reaches 45 degrees F. "Plan ahead to thaw the turkey in the refrigerator, allowing about 24 hours for each five pounds," Knabel says. "For example, a 10-pound bird will take about two days."

• Stuff the turkey immediately before cooking. "If you put warm stuffing inside the turkey, then put the bird back into the refrigerator, you give bacteria a chance to grow," Knabel says. "Avoid buying a refrigerated, fully cooked and stuffed turkey."

• Never partially cook a turkey or other raw animal foods. Plan to cook the turkey in one continuous stretch until the meat is done. Always cook it at an oven temperature at or above 325 degrees F.

Cookbooks and labels only can estimate how long the bird will

take to cook. "The only sure way to tell when the turkey is safe to eat is to insert an accurate meat thermometer into the center of the breast," he says. "The temperature should reach a minimum of 170 degrees F. The center of the stuffing should reach at least 165 degrees F."

• Avoid contaminating other foods with bacteria from raw poultry. "Cooks should wash their hands with soap and water immediately after handling raw turkey," says Knabel. "Cutting boards, utensils and dishes used to prepare

the raw bird also should be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized with one tablespoon of chlorine bleach per gallon of water before they come into contact with cooked turkey or other ready-to-eat foods, such as fresh vegetables."

• Remember the two-hour rule — don't let leftovers sit on the table or countertop for more than two hours. After the turkey is served, leftover meat should be cut off and placed in shallow, covered containers and refrigerated immediately. Rapid, even cooling will help prevent bacterial growth.

• Leftovers should be eaten or frozen within three to four days. Gravy and stuffing should be eaten within one to two days. Heat all leftovers to at least 165 degrees F before serving. Bring liquid leftovers, such as gravy, to a rolling boil.

The effects of Salmonella food-borne illness may appear within six hours after eating contaminated food. Symptoms include diarrhea, abdominal cramps, fever, nausea, vomiting, chills and headache.

In healthy adults, the symp-

toms may last up to three days. For children, the elderly and those whose immune systems aren't working properly, Salmonella can spread to vital organs and sometimes result in death.

For more information on safe handling of meat and poultry, contact USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555. Hours for November are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time) Monday through Friday; 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Nov. 20 and 21; and 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thanksgiving day, Nov. 25.

# Funny Questions People Ask About Turkey

CHICAGO, Ill. — With more than 270 combined years of turkey talking under their wings, the staff at the Butterball Turkey Talk-Line is well-equipped to answer virtually every turkey-related question. From the obvious (How do you roast a turkey?) to the unusual (Can I stuff my bird with hamburgers?), the professional staff at the Talk-Line is capable of resolving almost every "turkey trauma."

Yet every year, holiday turkey chefs call with new and noteworthy poultry problems. Following is a sampling of the 1993 Butterball Turkey Talk-Line's most memorable calls of all.

• Home alone, a Kentucky woman was in the doghouse when she called the Butterball Turkey Talk-Line. While preparing the turkey, her chihuahua jumped into the bird's body cavity and couldn't get out. She tried pulling the dog and shaking the bird, but nothing worked. She and the dog became more and more distraught. After calming the woman down, the Talk-Line home economist suggested carefully cutting the opening in the cavity of the

turkey wider. It worked and Fido was freed!

• Birdie, eagle and turkey? Roasting a turkey doesn't have to interfere with the daily routine, so said a retired Floridian. He called "Turkey Central" for turkey grilling tips while waiting to tee off from the 14th hole.

• Taking turkey preparation an extra step, a Virginian wondered, "How do you thaw a fresh turkey?" The Talk-Line staffer explained that fresh turkeys aren't frozen and don't need to be thawed.

• Don't wait until the last minute! On Thanksgiving Day, a Georgian woman took the "Be prepared" motto to heart. She had just agreed to host Thanksgiving Dinner and called the Talk-Line a year ahead of time for turkey tips.

• Happy Thanksgiving, President Clinton! A Southern woman called to comment, "On Thanksgiving Day, the Butterball Turkey Talk-Line is more important than the President. He can take the day off, but the Talk-Line staff can't." (The Butterball Turkey Talk-Line is open Thanksgiving Day, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., Central Standard Time.)

• Thanksgiving Dinner on the run. A woman called 1-800-323-4848 to find out how long it would take to roast her turkey. To answer the question, the Talk-Line home economist asked how much the bird weighed. The woman responded, "I don't know, it's still running around outside."

• Tofu turkey? No matter how

you slice it, Thanksgiving just isn't Thanksgiving without turkey. A restaurant owner in California wanted to know how to roast a turkey for a vegetarian menu.

• White meat, anyone? A West Coast woman took turkey preparation to extremes by scrubbing her bird with bleach. Afterward, she called the Talk-Line to find out how to clean off the bleach. To her dismay, she was advised to dispose of the turkey.

• A young girl called on behalf of her mother who needed roast-

ing advice. To provide approximate roasting times, the home economist asked what size the turkey was. Without asking her mother, the little girl paused, then replied, "Medium."

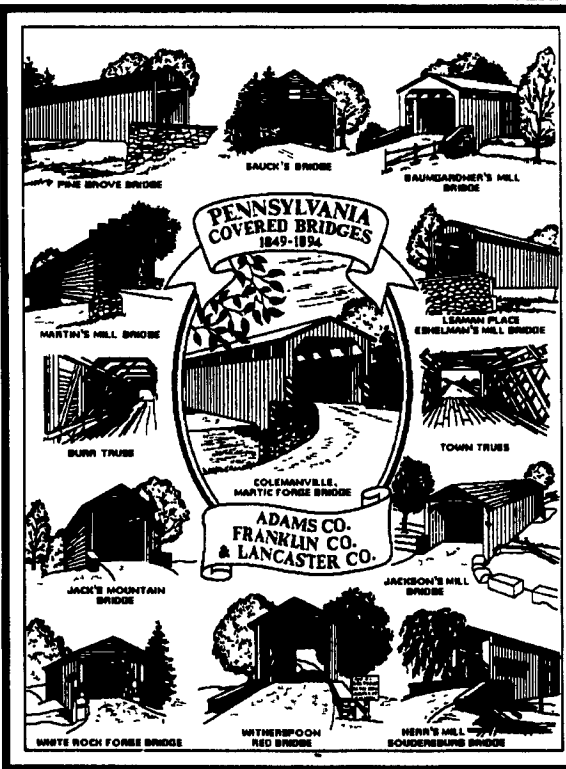
• A novice turkey-cooking chef wanted to know if the yellow netting and wrapper around the turkey should be removed before roasting. Envisioning a melted plastic turkey blob, the home economist responded, "Yes," then offered complete roasting directions.



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