

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
November 16, 2018

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Holiday Turkey Food Safety Tips

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) urges safe handling and preparation of turkey to avoid foodborne illness this holiday season. Turkey and other raw poultry products often contain harmful bacteria, such as *Salmonella*.

“Following the basics of food safety when preparing turkey and other foods can help you and your family stay healthy this holiday season,” said Laura Cronquist, NDDoH epidemiologist.

The NDDoH recommends the following food safety tips for preparing turkey:

- **Thaw.** Thaw a turkey in the refrigerator, in the microwave, or in a sink of cold water that is changed every 30 minutes. Never thaw a turkey by leaving it out on the counter.
- **Clean.** Always wash your hands with soap and clean, running water for at least 20 seconds before, during, and after preparing food and before eating. Wash utensils, cutting boards, dishes, and countertops with hot, soapy water after preparing each food item and before you begin to prepare the next item. Never wash raw poultry before cooking, since this can cause germs to spread to other foods, utensils, and surfaces.
- **Separate.** Keep raw poultry and meat separate from other foods. Never place cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry, seafood, or eggs.
- **Cook.** Set the oven temperature to at least 325°F. The safest way to cook stuffing is outside the turkey in a separate casserole dish. If you put stuffing in the turkey, do so just before cooking. To make sure the turkey has reached a safe internal temperature of 165°F, insert a food thermometer into the center of the stuffing and the thickest portions of the breast, thigh, and wing joint. Wait 20 minutes after removing the turkey from the oven before removing stuffing and carving the meat.
- **Chill.** Cut leftover turkey into small pieces and refrigerate or freeze within two hours of cooking. Store leftovers in shallow containers to allow for more rapid cooling, and make sure the refrigerator temperature is 40°F or colder.

- **Leftovers.** Use refrigerated turkey and stuffing within three to four days. Use gravy within one to two days. If freezing leftovers, use within six months for best quality. Cooked turkey may be eaten cold or reheated. If reheating, any leftover turkey or other foods should reach an internal temperature of 165°F.

Salmonellosis (*Salmonella* infection) can cause mild to severe illness. The most common symptoms include diarrhea, abdominal pain, and fever. Symptoms typically begin within 12 to 72 hours after exposure to the bacteria, but can take as long as 16 days. Symptoms generally resolve without treatment in four to seven days, but severe cases and cases involving complications may require hospitalization. Severe illness is more likely to occur in young children, older adults, and those with impaired immune systems.

For more information about food safety, please visit www.cdc.gov/foodsafety or contact the NDDoH Division of Disease Control at 701.328.2378.

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