

Don't Stuff or Wash the Turkey

My mom and grandma have always cooked the stuffing in the turkey each Thanksgiving. But now, I hear that practice should be avoided. Why?

Despite long held traditions in many families, it's best not to cook your stuffing inside the turkey.

This is because uncooked poultry can harbor bacterial pathogens, which can be present both on the inside and outside of raw turkey.

This is because uncooked poultry can harbor bacterial pathogens, which can be present both on the inside and outside of a raw turkey. The only way to destroy this potentially dangerous bacterium is to cook the turkey to an internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit, using a meat thermometer to ensure the bird has reached this temperature.

The pop-up thermometers are not very reliable, so it is best to verify doneness with a meat/food thermometer.

To measure the temperature of a turkey you should insert the meat thermometer into three areas of the turkey to measure its internal temperature: in the thickest part of the turkey breast, in the innermost part of the wing and in the innermost part of the turkey thigh.

Many of us will be making a turkey even if we don't have a big group of people like other years. Turkey meat is nutritious, delicious, and low in calories. Most stores have it on sale, so it is very economical.

The concern is that planning the stuffing into the center of the raw turkey exposes the stuffing to the bacterial pathogens throughout the cooking process, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety, and Inspection Service.

The stuffing, which is traditionally moist and made with bread or cornbread, is very porous. So as the turkey cooks, juices that may contain bacterial pathogens such as salmonella may be absorbed into the stuffing during the cooking process. Unless the stuffing is also cooked to an internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit, it is unsafe to eat.

Even if the turkey itself has reached the safe minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees, the stuffing may not have reached a temperature high enough to destroy bacteria that may be present, USDA says.

The safest route is to cook your stuffing separate from the turkey and then place it inside the fully cooked turkey if you want to soak up some of the rich delicious flavor of the turkey.

Other food safety tips from USDA for turkey day:

- Don't wash your turkey. Washing raw meat and poultry products just spread

bacteria around your kitchen. The only way to destroy bacteria on your turkey is to cook it to a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees as measured with a food/meat thermometer.

- Don't leave the food out on the table all day. It's best to serve the food hot. Bacteria can grow rapidly on food that's left out for more than two hours after cooking. Put hot food away by dividing it up into small containers and refrigerate or freeze within two hours. (referenced from T. Turner article. "Don't Stuff or Wash the Bird.")

Pat Brinkman is the Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Educator with Ohio State University Extension Fayette County.



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