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UW-Extension Teams Up With USDA to Provide Thanksgiving Tips and Resources

With the number of things that can go wrong in the home kitchen, steering clear of food safety blunders can be challenging. Whether it's prepping a new dish, or prepping for more guests at your table, the USDA's food safety experts keep food safety simple. Now, UW-Extension and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) team up to provide food safety tips and resources.

"Thanksgiving dinner is one of the largest meals we prepare each year," said Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety Carmen Rottenberg. "Don't cut corners and put your family at risk for foodborne illness by forgetting to wash your hands after handling the raw turkey, and always remember to use a food thermometer to be sure its cooked to 165 degrees."

Food poisoning is a serious public health threat. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that millions of people suffer from foodborne illness each year, resulting in roughly 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths. Recent USDA research found that 34 percent of Americans may have someone at high risk for foodborne illness in their home.

To help your guests avoid getting sick this Thanksgiving, follow these simple steps:

20 seconds of hand washing

The CDC recommends washing your hands with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds. Handwashing is especially important when handling raw meats. Unfortunately, in a recent USDA study, participants failed to wash their hands sufficiently a shocking 97 percent of the time. Without proper handwashing, a well-intentioned home cook could quickly spread bacteria around the kitchen. Hand washing should always include five simple steps:

1. Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.

Purpose Statement

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Tus Tswv Hauj Lwm Ntawm (EEO/AA), ntawm lub Tsev Kawm Ntawv Qib Siab (University of Wisconsin-Extension) pab rau kev ncaj ncees txog kev hauj lwm thiab kev pab cuam, xws li nyob rau hauv Title VI, Title IX, thiab ntawm tsab cai Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) yuav tsum kom muaj.

2. Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
3. Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds.
4. Rinse your hands well under clean, running water.
5. Dry your hands using a clean towel.

Say no to 'bird baths'

Say no to 'bird baths.' That is, do not rinse or wash your turkey. Doing so can spread bacteria around the kitchen, contaminating countertops, towels and other food. Washing poultry doesn't remove bacteria from the bird. Only cooking the turkey to the correct internal temperature will ensure all bacteria are killed.

Do not forget to wash your hands before and after seasoning your bird too. Forty-eight percent of participants in our recent study contaminated their spice containers when seasoning poultry. If you've held raw turkey, make sure to wash your hands completely before seasoning, and if you rub around those spices on the bird by hand, make sure to wash your hands completely afterwards.

Take an accurate temp inside, cook the stuffing outside the turkey

Don't rely on those pop-up thermometers to determine if your turkey is safe! Take the bird's temperature with a food thermometer in three areas — the thickest part of the breast, the innermost part of the wing and the innermost part of the thigh — and make sure all three locations reach 165°F. If one of those locations does not register at 165°F, then continue cooking until all three locations reach the correct internal temperature. In recent USDA research, 88 percent of participants did not cook their poultry to the safe internal cooking temperature of 165°F.

When stuffing is cooked inside the turkey's cavity, it must be checked with a food thermometer and reach 165°F as well. The density of stuffing can mean that while the turkey's breast, wing and thigh have registered 165°F, the stuffing temperature can lag behind. Turkeys are tricky enough, so it's easier to keep things simple and cook the stuffing outside the bird.

Use the two-hour rule to avoid foodborne illness

Everyone loves to graze during Thanksgiving, but when perishable food sits at room temperature, it is sitting in a temperature range where bacteria love to multiply. This range, between 40-140°F, is known as the 'danger zone.' If foods have been left out at room temperature for more than two hours they should be discarded.

Call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline

If you have questions, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) to talk to a food safety expert from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Central Time, Monday through Friday, in English and Spanish. If you need help on Thanksgiving Day, the Meat and Poultry Hotline is available from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. Central Time. You can also chat live at [AskKaren.gov](https://askkaren.gov) during the hotline's hours of operation.

Consumers with food safety questions can visit [FoodSafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) to learn more about how to safely select, thaw and prepare a turkey. For more Thanksgiving food safety tips, follow FSIS on Twitter [@USDAFoodSafety](https://twitter.com/USDAFoodSafety) or on Facebook at [Facebook.com/FoodSafety.gov](https://www.facebook.com/FoodSafety.gov). You can also find more food safety resources on the Lincoln County UW-Extension website at <https://lincoln.uwex.edu/>.