

Date November 17, 2020  
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## **Prepare Your Turkey and Thanksgiving Meal Safely**

Thanksgiving is usually a wonderful time to gather with friends and family for a delicious meal. The Livingston Health Department reminds residents to prepare their turkey and side dishes properly in order to prevent foodborne illnesses. In addition, it's critical to take the COVID-19 pandemic into consideration when considering any get-together.

### **Celebrating Thanksgiving During COVID-19**

Any gathering with friends or family can increase your chances of being infected with the COVID-19 virus and/or spreading it to others. The following tips can help keep you and your loved ones safe.

- One of the safest ways to celebrate is only with those who live in your household. If you would like to celebrate with others who are not in your household, consider setting up a time to communicate virtually or by phone.
- If you are planning to celebrate with others who don't live in your household, remember to wear a mask, practice social distancing around guests, and maintain good handwashing.
- Limit the number of guests you are celebrating with. Be aware that NJ Governor Murphy's latest Executive Order, Effective November 17<sup>th</sup>, states that general indoor gatherings are limited to 10 people.
- Limit those who are in the kitchen area where food is being prepared and ask guests to bring their own food. Avoid sharing food, utensils, and drinks with others. If you are delivering food to those you care about, leave the food at their front doorstep to avoid having close contact with them.
- If you are hosting Thanksgiving at your home, be sure to clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces in your home. If possible, open the windows and doors to allow air to flow in rooms where guests will be or stay outdoors (depending on the weather).
- If you are traveling for the holiday outside of New Jersey, be sure to check the travel advisory list for New Jersey by visiting [nj.gov/health](http://nj.gov/health) for more information. As of November 10, NJ.Gov reports that there are 45 states and jurisdictions on the list of "impacted states" to and from which non-essential travel is discouraged; those who have traveled to any of those areas are asked to self-quarantine for 14 days for their health and safety and for the health and safety of others with whom they may come in contact.

## **Preparing a Turkey**

Whether it is your first time making a Thanksgiving meal or you have been hosting for years, the following tips and reminders can help ensure that your food is prepared safely.

### **Thawing a Turkey**

First, determine whether you will purchase a fresh or frozen turkey. If you are buying a frozen turkey, make sure you have enough room in your freezer to store the turkey until you thaw it. A fresh or thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator for one to two days. Thawing a turkey in the refrigerator requires one day (24 hours) in the refrigerator per every four to five pounds.

Alternatively, a turkey can be thawed by placing it in cold water: allow 30 minutes per pound, and change the water every 30 minutes. A turkey can also be thawed in the microwave if the microwave is large enough. Follow the instructions of the manufacturer. If the turkey is thawed in cold water or the microwave, cook the turkey immediately afterwards.

### **Safely Handling a Turkey**

Before cooking, be sure to remove any of the giblets/neck, which can be found inside the cavity of the turkey.

Wash your hands, but not your turkey! It is impossible to wash bacteria off of the bird; cooking is the only way to get rid of the bacteria from the turkey. That means you can save yourself the trouble and mess of washing poultry.

After touching the raw turkey, thoroughly wash your hands.

Be sure to thoroughly wash cutting boards or any other surfaces with which the raw turkey may have come in contact.

### **Cooking the Stuffing and Turkey**

Be sure to choose a roasting pan that is large enough for the turkey and has sturdy handles.

Stuffing can be cooked either inside or outside of the turkey. If cooking it inside the turkey, make sure the stuffing is moist and packed loosely. If you are adding any meat or shellfish to your stuffing, be sure the meat or shellfish is fully cooked before you stuff it inside the turkey. Stuffing placed inside the turkey is extremely porous, which means that bacteria from the uncooked turkey finds its way into the stuffing. This makes it critical for stuffing prepared inside a turkey to be thoroughly cooked to a minimum of 165° F to be safe for consumption.

Use the guide below to determine how long to cook a turkey in the oven. Remember to cook the turkey until it reaches a minimum internal temperature of 165° F. If the turkey is stuffed, it will

need to cook for about an additional 15 minutes in the oven; be sure the internal temperature of the stuffing reaches at least 165° F. After the turkey is done cooking, let it rest for 20 minutes before carving.

**Cooking Time for an Unstuffed Turkey in a 325° F Oven:**

- 8 to 12 lbs: 2.75 to 3 hours
- 12 to 14 lbs: 3 to 3.75 hours
- 14 to 18 lbs: 3.75 to 4.25 hours
- 18 to 20 lbs: 4.25 to 4.5 hours
- 20 to 24 lbs: 4.5 to 5 hours

Make sure any leftovers are put away in the refrigerator within two hours. Once refrigerated, leftover turkey and stuffing should be eaten within three to four days.

Find more information at [www.cdc.gov/foodsafety](http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety) and [foodsafety.gov](http://foodsafety.gov).

The Livingston Health Department wishes you and your loved ones a safe, happy, and healthy Thanksgiving and holiday season!