

News Column for use the week of November 18, 2019

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Tips to Help Ensure a Safe Thanksgiving Meal

The shorter, darker days of fall have some of us thinking about the next thing to look forward to and for many, that's Thanksgiving Day.

Sharing a meal of traditional foods, such as turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie and even adding something new to the menu is a way to connect with family and friends on a uniquely American holiday. Kansas State University consumer food safety specialist Londa Nwadike has tips to help ensure a good holiday by keeping those foods safe.

Turkey—Buy your turkey from a reputable source. Frozen turkey must be thawed in the refrigerator or in cold water, not on the kitchen counter. In the refrigerator, allow 24 hours of thawing time for every five pounds of turkey. In cold water, allow about 30 minutes thawing time per pound of turkey and change the water every 30 minutes to ensure that the outer layer of turkey will not get warm enough to support microbial growth. Turkey and other meats should **not** be rinsed before cooking as that will only spread those germs around the sink, which can cross-contaminate other foods. Any bacteria that might be rinsed off the surface would be easily killed by cooking in the oven.

The turkey should be cooked in a preheated oven set at a minimum of 325 degrees F. When cooking an unstuffed bird, plan on a range of approximately three hours for an 8- to 12-pound turkey to approximately five hours for a 20- to 24-pound turkey. For a stuffed bird, plan on an additional 15-30 minutes of cooking time.

To determine if the turkey is safely cooked, a food thermometer should be used to ensure that the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast has reached a minimum temperature of at least 165 degrees F.

Stuffing – Many people love stuffing, but unfortunately, microorganisms love to grow in it as well. Cooking the stuffing outside of the bird is the safest method, but if you do choose to stuff your turkey, stuff it loosely just prior to cooking and ensure that the stuffing is moist. The stuffing should also reach at least 165 degrees F.

Pumpkin pie - Pies and any other baked goods with fillings made of eggs and milk, including custard pies and cheesecake, must be baked to a safe internal temperature of at least 160 degrees F and should be refrigerated after baking or purchase.

Egg dishes – Any dishes containing eggs, such as escalloped corn, should be cooked to reach an internal temperature of 160 degrees F.

Raw produce – Use separate cutting boards for chopping foods that will be eaten raw than those used for meats. Another option is to wash cutting boards with hot, soapy water between these types of foods. If produce is not pre-rinsed, it should be rinsed carefully and any visible soil scrubbed with a produce brush.

Leftovers – For some of us, leftovers are as good as the initial meal itself. Keep them safe by refrigerating the stuffing and turkey (with the meat removed from the carcass) separately in shallow containers within two hours of cooking. Leftover turkey will keep in the refrigerator for three to four days, gravy and stuffing only one or two days. Turkey can be frozen for up to one month with no loss of flavor or safety. Reheat leftovers until 165 degrees F.

“If you are buying a pre-cooked turkey, it’s important to know the vendor,” Nwadike said. “Bring it home immediately and refrigerate it. When you reheat it, make sure the temperature of the cooked meat reaches 165 degrees F.”

More information about food safety questions and help in preparing a Thanksgiving turkey is available by calling the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-674-6854. Hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day. For more information about food safety in general, contact Kathy in the Southwind Extension Iola office at 620-365-2242 or kmcewan@ksu.edu. Also, check us out on the web at www.southwind.ksu.edu