

Let's Talk Turkey!

It was the best turkey dinner you ever prepared, but now people are complaining about stomach pains, headaches, nausea, diarrhea and vomiting. Some people would say, "It's just the flu" but there may be another reason: foodborne illness. Millions of Canadians suffer from foodborne illness every year. Harmful bacteria can grow in food if mishandling occurs while food is being stored, prepared or cooked.

Turkey and other high protein foods such as meat, fish, eggs and dairy products are commonly associated with illness. This is because these types of food can contain pathogenic bacteria, the type of bacteria that multiply in food causing food-borne illness.

Avoid Food Poisoning

- Wash your hands before preparing any foods and again anytime you may have contaminated your hands, for example, after touching raw meat. Be sure to wash your hands thoroughly. Don't forget to wash between your fingers and under your nails.
- Refrigerate meats as quickly as possible after purchase. If high protein foods are left out at room temperature for more than two hours, any bacteria present can multiply to a level that could cause food poisoning.
- Follow label instructions. If the label says to cook the turkey directly from frozen follow the instructions provided with the turkey.
- Thaw meats in the refrigerator on the bottom shelf. Allow 24 hours for every 2.25 kilograms (5 pounds) of meat. A 10-kilogram turkey will take 4 to 5 days to thaw in the refrigerator.
- Cook the meat thoroughly. The turkey is done when the internal temperature reaches 82°C or 180°F. Probe the thickest part of the meat with the thermometer.
- It is safer to cook the turkey and stuffing separately. If you stuff the turkey before cooking stuff the turkey just before putting it in the oven. If you prepare the turkey early, store the stuffing separately in the refrigerator until you are ready to cook the bird. Rinse the cavity of the turkey with cold water. Stuff loosely, remove the stuffing from the bird immediately after cooking is done, and store separately. All stuffing, whether cooked separately or inside the bird, should be heated to a minimum internal temperature of 74°C or 165°F.
- Wash dishes, cutting boards and counters with hot soapy water after each use. Add ½ teaspoon of bleach for every litre of rinse water.
- Time foods to be ready at the same time. If this is not possible, keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold until you are ready to serve. Foods left at room temperature even though they have been properly cooked or prepared, can still cause food poisoning.

For more information of safe food handling, please contact Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health.