

Expert serves up turkey tips for a healthy holiday

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Take steps to prevent foodborne illness before, during and after preparing the meal.

(HealthDay)—A big part of having a happy and healthy Thanksgiving is making sure you correctly thaw, clean, cook and store the turkey, an expert says.

Turkey and other poultry are home to illness-causing bacteria such as salmonella and *E. coli*, but you can prevent the growth and spread of such bacteria by following some simple steps, said Donna Duberg, an assistant professor of clinical laboratory science and germ expert at Saint Louis University.

Before you begin preparing your turkey, clean the kitchen counter and sink with either a solution of one-part vinegar and nine-parts water or hot, soapy water.

"Make sure you clean everything from the counter to the utensils and the

cutting boards, so that bacteria from your kitchen do not transfer to the turkey," Duberg said in a university news release.

Thaw a frozen turkey evenly by refrigerating it for five to six days, putting it in [cold water](#), or microwaving it. For every pound, let the turkey sit in cold water (less than 40 degrees Fahrenheit) for 30 minutes and change the water frequently. As the turkey sits in the water, the bird will thaw more evenly and at a temperature which slows the growth of bacteria.

"If you decide to thaw the turkey in a microwave, make sure you cook it immediately as some parts of the turkey may have heated unevenly and can start growing bacteria," Duberg noted.

"Forty to 140 degrees Fahrenheit is the danger zone—that's when the turkey is most prone to growing bacteria. It is essential that the turkey thaw and be kept cold until cooking (less than 40 degrees)," she explained.

Before cooking, make sure the turkey is completely thawed. If you're cooking it without stuffing, check the temperature of the innermost part of the thigh, breast and wing with a food thermometer and make sure all are 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

"If you plan to put the stuffing inside the turkey, make sure the temperature of the center of the stuffing is 165 degrees Fahrenheit," Duberg recommended.

Do not leave cooked turkey out for more than two hours.

"When the turkey is left out, any [bacteria](#) present will start growing. Children and the elderly with a weaker immune system could easily get sick," she warned.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about the [safe preparation of your holiday meal](#).

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