

# Home cooks risk food poisoning from washing their Christmas bird

December 22 2014, by Deborah Linton

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Washing the Christmas Day turkey is putting home cooks at risk of poisoning their dinner guests.

In a [national survey](#) led by Professor Dan Rigby at The University of Manchester, nearly 50% of people said they always or usually put their festive bird under the tap before cooking it.

But Food Safety advice from microbiologists and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) warns against it as it risks spraying pathogens, such as Salmonella and Campylobacter, over clean plates and cutlery, causing

cross contamination which can lead to [food poisoning](#).

Almost 900 people took part in the national online [survey](#), which is part of wider work on food and disease economics being carried out by researchers at the University. It found that 48.6% of respondents always or usually washed their turkey under the tap. Only 41% said they never washed the festive poultry.

And men who take charge of preparing the family bird were more likely to contravene food standards advice, the research found.

Prof Rigby, a lecturer in environmental economics, said: "Washing poultry is often said to be something that older people were brought up doing, but the survey showed that it is 18 to 34 year-olds who are most likely to wash their Turkey this Christmas. We also found that men were more likely to wash the turkey than women.

"People are underestimating the level of contamination. Despite years of information campaigns against washing poultry the habit seems hard to kick for many and the findings of our survey suggest this is not just an older generation habit that will fade away.

"Christmas is one of the most pressured days for home cooks to deliver a great meal but people are still not getting the food hygiene message around turkeys – the centrepiece of the meal. The message is simple, wash your hands not your bird."

According to the University of Manchester survey, 57% of men reported always or usually washing the family's Christmas turkey, compared to 44% of women.

The survey found similar behaviour when it came to chicken, with 45% of respondents reporting that they always or usually washed chickens

before cooking them.

Three weeks ago, the FSA revealed contamination rates for supermarkets, finding that 70% of chickens on sale in the UK tested positive for *Campylobacter* - the most common cause of [food](#) poisoning in the UK.

Provided by University of Manchester

Citation: Home cooks risk food poisoning from washing their Christmas bird (2014, December 22) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-12-home-cooks-food-poisoning-christmas.html>

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