



Ontario Home Economics Association

COMMUNIQUÉ

For Immediate Release

Ask A Professional Home Economist

OHEA SUPPORTS HEALTH CANADA'S "LET'S TALK TURKEY"

Stephanie Charron, P.H.Ec., a Professional Home Economist and member of the Ontario Home Economics Association, works for Health Canada in the Ontario/Nunavut Regional office in Scarborough and talks with consumers and health professionals on a daily basis about food safety issues. Health Canada has published some information on turkeys – Let's Talk Turkey – which is attached.

The Ontario Home Economics Association, a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists, promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life.

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For more information, please contact:

Meline Batten
Ontario Home Economics Association
Box 45, R.R. #5, Dundalk, ON N0C 1B0
Tel/Fax: (519) 925-9684
Website: www.ohea.on.ca

In affiliation with:
Canadian Home Economics Association
Association canadienne d'économie familiale
151, rue Slater St., suite 307
Ottawa, ON K1P 5H3
Tel. (613) 238-8817 • Fax (613) 238-8972
ccronier@chea-acef.ca <<mailto:ccronier@chea-acef.ca>>

"Home Economists at the Heart of Home Life"

LET'S TALK TURKEY

Your turkey dinner was scrumptious. A succulent bird, cranberries, mashed potatoes... the works.

Then why do you feel so rotten now? The cramps and the diarrhea struck early this morning and this illness is threatening to ruin your whole holiday.

Most people would blame the flu, but food poisoning is the actual culprit. Salmonella isn't exactly a household word, but it should be. Thousands of Canadians each year get food poisoning after eating food contaminated by this and other types of bacteria. The heat of cooking usually kills Salmonella bacteria. However, improper techniques of storage, preparation or cooking of poultry can put you and your family at risk. Although poultry frequently carries Salmonella, other raw foods such as meat, fish, seafoods, unpasteurized dairy products, raw shell eggs and products containing raw eggs can be a problem too.

A few easy steps in the kitchen can help you and your family have a safe holiday.

You Can't Tell by Looking

- It's not possible to tell by looking whether food has been contaminated, so treat all poultry and other raw meats as though they are.
- When you bring poultry home from the store, refrigerate or freeze it immediately. Refrigerated fresh poultry should be used within two or three days.
- Frozen poultry can be safely thawed in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave oven. If you must thaw at room temperature, wrap the bird in a heavy paper bag so that the surface of the bird doesn't become warm before the centre of the bird thaws.
- Drippings produced during thawing should be considered contaminated and affected surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- Wash hands well before and after handling poultry. Avoid cross-contamination of other foods by keeping your utensils, countertops and your cutting boards clean.
- Stuffing is a great place for bacteria to grow because it is moist and tends to heat up and cool down slowly. It is recommended that stuffing be cooked separately, preferably in an oven dish or on top of the stove, because stuffing insulates the body cavity from the oven heat and Salmonella may survive cooking. If poultry is to be stuffed, stuff it loosely just before roasting and take it out immediately after cooking to allow for more rapid cooling. Stuffing, whether cooked separately or within a bird should achieve a minimal internal temperature of 74°C (165°F).
- Can you refreeze defrosted poultry? You can, if the poultry meat is still cold and ice crystals are still present.

Hot and Cold

In order to keep your holiday food safe, Health Canada recommends that you follow these simple steps:

Refrigeration:

- Bacteria grow rapidly at room temperature, so don't leave poultry or other foods that should be refrigerated sitting on the kitchen counter or in the car. Remove unfrozen raw poultry and other raw meats from the refrigerator just before you handle and cook it.

Cleanliness:

- Wash hands before and after handling raw poultry and meat.
- Thoroughly wash dishes, cutting boards, counters and utensils with hot water and detergent. Then use dilute chlorine bleach (1 tsp bleach in 3 cups of water), rinse with fresh water, and dry. You can also put the used board and utensils in the dishwasher. Plastic cutting boards are best because they are easier to sanitize.
- Keep your dish cloths as well as dish rags used for wiping utensils, pots and pans clean. These can harbor large numbers of micro-organisms and should ideally be changed every day. If this cannot be done for practical reasons, they should be changed after a few days. Make sure to hang them away from the kitchen garbage pail (which should be automatically self-closing with a lid), often kept underneath the sink. Dish cloths can be washed first and then soaked in dilute bleach or simply cleaned in automatic laundry machines (with appropriate soaps/detergents) and then dried.
- Any utensils which have come into previous contact with potentially hazardous foods or contaminated dish rags/cloths should be thoroughly washed, as described previously, before being subsequently used to touch cooked or ready-to-eat foods.
- Never put cooked poultry on unwashed plates which previously contained potentially hazardous foods such as raw foods of animal origin or unwashed fruits and vegetables.

Cook thoroughly:

- Never eat raw or undercooked poultry.
- Cook raw poultry meat, especially ground meat and turkey rolls, thoroughly to the centre. Be certain juices are no longer pink.
- Cook birds until the internal temperature in the breast or thigh is 85°C (185°F) or the temperature of the stuffing is 74°C (165°F). Use of a meat thermometer is strongly recommended. Poultry is likely to be done when the leg on the whole birds moves easily, or when the meat in cuts of poultry is tender to a fork and the meat throughout is no longer pink.
- Large cooked birds such as turkey, if not consumed immediately, should be deboned or cut up and the meat placed in small packages in the refrigerator for more rapid and uniform cooling. For large cooked birds that might not be cut before refrigeration, it is very important to get the internal temperature of the meat to below 4°C in less than 4 hours.
- Ensure that cooked foods do not come into contact with uncooked foods.

Keep it hot:

- Cooked foods should be eaten hot. Foods left to cool at room temperature may encourage the rapid growth of bacteria.
- Use up refrigerated leftovers as soon as possible, preferably within two to three days.
- In general, food should not be reheated more than once. Reheated food should be heated until it is piping hot (over 74°C/165°F) throughout before being served.

Make Safety a Household Word

Follow these rules and have a safe and happy holiday.

- Keep hands and utensils clean.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Remember that the danger zone wherein bacteria multiply rapidly in food is between 4° and 60°C.
- Take special care when handling large quantities of poultry, other raw meats, or any perishable food.
- "Slow cookers" are not advised for large pieces of meat, or frozen or stuffed products, because the temperature may stay too long in the danger zone or may not get high enough during the cooking time to kill bacteria.

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Pour des copies supplémentaires de Votre santé et vous communiquez avec:

Health Canada/Santé Canada Publications Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9 Fax.:
(613) 9415366