

**PREPARING TURKEY FOR THE HOLIDAYS**

**HAND WASHING:** Thoroughly wash your hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with warm soapy water before and after handling food, raw food product as well as after using the toilet diapering children, blowing you nose, playing with pets, etc.



**THAWING:** The best way to thaw all frozen foods is on a tray in its original wrapping, in the refrigerator. When thawing large amounts of food, allow 24 hours per five pounds of product. For example, it could take up to five days to thaw a 24-pound turkey.

If you are in a hurry, thaw in a microwave oven. However, it could still take one to two hours on the defrost cycle. Shield bony areas to prevent cooking during the defrost cycle and rotate the turkey several times during defrosting. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's directions for thawing food in your microwave oven. If you thaw food in your microwave, you must also cook it immediately thereafter.

**COOKING:** Roast your turkey in an oven at a temperature of 325°F or hotter. The best way to check turkey temperatures is to use a meat/probe thermometer. Insert the thermometer in the large meaty muscle on the inside of the thigh or breast without touching the bone. The turkey is done when the thermometer reaches 165 degrees or above and the juices run clear.

When cooking a turkey, don't forget to remove the giblet package in the cavity prior to cooking. Cooking the stuffing in a separate casserole dish is safest method of cooking. However, if you prefer to cook the stuffing inside the turkey, fill the cavity loosely and make sure that the center of the stuffing reaches 165 degrees F. If the center does not reach at least 165 degrees F., the stuffing may never get hot enough to kill bacteria that are normally killed during cooking, and the risk of Foodborne illness increases.

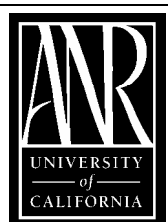
Weight (pounds)	Hours
8 to 12	2.75 to 3
12 to 14	3 to 3.75
14 to 18	3.75 to 4.25
18 to 20	4.25 to 4.5
20 to 24	4.5 to 5

Doneness can also be detected by inserting a long-tined fork into the thickest part of the inner thigh. If the juices run clear, not pink, the turkey is done. The following roasting chart is for fresh or thawed, unstuffed turkey.

The National Turkey Federation recommends allowing whole turkeys to stand 10-20 minutes before carving.

To insure a safe holiday meal you have approximately two hours to serve the meal and then refrigerate or freeze the leftovers. Why just two hours? Because harmful bacteria that cause food borne illness can multiply to unsafe levels on perishable foods left at room temperature for more than two hours.

**STORING LEFTOVERS:** Place leftover food in shallow containers (to speed the cooling process) prior to placing inside the refrigerator. Large or deep containers of food cool slowly and also raise the temperature inside the refrigerator. If you cannot quickly use leftovers, freeze them. Frozen turkey, stuffing and gravy should be used within one month. Leftover turkey kept in the refrigerator should be used within 3 to 4 days; stuffing and gravy within 1 to 2 days. Bring leftover gravy to a rolling boil before serving.



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