



## LET'S TALK TURKEY

### The Issue

Thousands of Canadians get food poisoning every year from food that has not been stored, prepared or cooked properly. It happens a lot with turkey and chicken. However, by following some simple rules in the kitchen, you can help protect your family from food poisoning.

### Background

Food poisoning is caused by eating foods that are contaminated by some type of bacteria, such as Salmonella. It's not unusual for raw turkey and chicken to be contaminated. Other raw foods such as meat, fish, seafood, unpasteurized dairy products, raw shell eggs and products containing raw eggs can be a problem too.

Cooking food at high temperatures usually kills the bacteria contained in the food itself. However, that precaution doesn't help to control bacteria that may have spread to your refrigerator, counters or utensils while the food was being stored or prepared for cooking.

### Minimizing Your Risk

It's not possible to tell if food is contaminated simply by looking at it. For that reason, it's best to treat all poultry and other raw meats as though they are contaminated. To protect your family's health, follow these rules:

#### Storage

- Bacteria grow rapidly at room temperature. When you buy poultry, don't leave it sitting in the car or on a counter when you get home. Refrigerate or freeze it immediately.
- Use refrigerated poultry within two or three days.

### Thawing

- The safest ways to thaw frozen poultry are in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave oven.
- If you must thaw poultry at room temperature, wrap it in a heavy paper bag so the surface of the bird won't become warm before the centre thaws. Remember, bacteria grows rapidly in foods at room temperature.
- Drippings produced during thawing may be contaminated. Since you can't know for sure, play it safe by cleaning and disinfecting any surface touched by drippings.
- You can safely refreeze defrosted poultry if the meat is still cold and ice crystals are still present.

### Preparation

- Wash your hands thoroughly before and after handling poultry, or any raw meat.
- If anything in your kitchen, including utensils, cutting boards, counters and dish clothes, has been in direct contact with raw poultry or its juices, clean them thoroughly before using again to prepare other foods.

### Stuffing

- Stuffing is moist and is slow to heat up and cool down. For those reasons, stuffing provides an ideal place for bacteria to grow.
- The safest way to deal with stuffing is to cook it separately, either in its own oven dish, or on the stove top.
- If you're going to stuff a bird, stuff it loosely just before roasting, and take all of the stuffing out immediately after



cooking so it will cool down faster.

- All stuffing, whether cooked separately or inside a bird, should be heated to a minimum internal temperature of 74°C (165°F).

## Cooking

- Never eat raw or undercooked turkey or chicken.
- It's best to use a meat thermometer. Cook birds until the temperature of the thickest part of the breast or thigh is 85°C (185°F).
- Cook raw poultry meat, especially ground meat and turkey rolls, thoroughly to the centre. Be certain that juices are no longer pink.
- As a general rule of thumb, poultry is done when:
  - the leg of a whole bird moves easily
  - the meat in cuts of poultry is tender to the fork, with no pink showing anywhere.

## Leftovers

- To store leftovers safely, cut and debone the meat from large cooked birds. Refrigerate the meat as soon as possible in small containers for rapid and uniform cooling.
- If you're not going to remove the meat from the carcass, be sure to refrigerate the cooked bird quickly.
- Make sure that cooked foods don't come into contact with food that hasn't been cooked.
- Use refrigerated leftovers as soon as possible, ideally within two or three days.
- When reheating food, make sure it's piping hot. In general, you shouldn't reheat the same leftovers more than once.

## Cleanliness in the Kitchen

- Plastic cutting boards are best because they're easier to sanitize.
- To sanitize kitchen materials (dishes, cutting boards and utensils) put them in the dishwasher, or:
  - wash them with hot water and detergent
  - use a solution of 1 tsp of bleach in 3 cups of water to disinfect them
  - rinse again with fresh water, and dry them.
- Bacteria can thrive in dish cloths, so change them every day if you can. Keep them clean by washing with detergent as part of your regular laundry load, or by hand-washing then soaking them in diluted bleach.
- Don't hang dish cloths near the kitchen garbage pail. For greater protection against the spread of germs, choose a kitchen garbage pail with a self-closing lid.

By following these suggestions, you can help protect your family from food poisoning. It's your health, and it's up to you.

## Health Canada's Role

Health Canada sets policies and standards governing the safety and nutritional quality of all food sold in Canada. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) enforces the policies and standards, ensuring that any foodborne illness is detected early, and that all necessary warnings go out to the public quickly.

As a founding member of the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education, Health Canada also participates in public awareness campaigns about safe food practices. One example is a program called Fight BAC™, which

encourages Canadian consumers to think of food safety at every step of the food handling process, from shopping for groceries, to re-heating leftovers.

## Need More Info?

Contact Health Canada's Food and Nutrition program at:  
[http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/lifestyles/food\\_nutr.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/lifestyles/food_nutr.html)

Contact the Canadian Food Inspection Agency at:  
1-800-442-2342  
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/corpaffr/foodfacts/turkeye.shtml>

### Links to useful Web sites:

Dietitians of Canada  
[http://www.dietitians.ca/english/kitchen/fridge/main\\_fridge\\_turkey.html](http://www.dietitians.ca/english/kitchen/fridge/main_fridge_turkey.html)

The Alberta Turkey Producers  
[http://www.abturkey.ab.ca/nutrition\\_pubs.html](http://www.abturkey.ab.ca/nutrition_pubs.html)  
Phone: 780-465-5755  
Fax: 780-465-5528

Additional It's Your Health articles can be found at:  
[www.healthcanada.ca/iyh](http://www.healthcanada.ca/iyh)  
You can also call (613) 957-2991