

# CONSUMER INFORMATION FROM USDA

Food Safety and Inspection Service, Food Safety Education & Communications Staff  
(202)720-7943; Fax (202) 720-9063

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## Turkey Basics: Handling Cooked Dinners

### Take-out Dinners Hot from the Oven

#### Eating Within 2 hours?

Pick up the food HOT...and keep it HOT. Keeping foods warm is not enough. Harmful bacteria multiply fastest between 40 and 140°F.

Set oven temperature high enough to keep the turkey at 140°F or above. (Use a meat thermometer.) Stuffing and side dishes must also stay HOT. Covering with foil will help keep the food moist.

#### Eating Much Later?

It's not a good idea to try and keep foods hot longer than 2 hours. They will be safer and taste better if you:

- Remove all stuffing from the turkey cavity immediately and refrigerate.
- Cut turkey off the bone and refrigerate. Slice breast meat; legs and wings may be left whole.
- Refrigerate potatoes, gravy, and vegetables, too, in shallow containers.

#### Reheating?

Reheat thoroughly to 165°F until hot and steaming. Bring gravy to a rolling boil.

In the microwave oven, cover food and rotate dish so it heats evenly. Follow the microwave manufacturer's instructions. Inadequate heating in the microwave or conventional oven can contribute to foodborne illness.

### Cooked and Refrigerated

#### Keep Cold foods COLD.

Refrigerate cold foods as soon as you get home (always within 2 hours). Serve your meal within 1 to 2 days.

#### Reheating a Whole Turkey is NOT Recommended.

If you plan to reheat a turkey, cut the meat off the bone. Slice breast meat. Legs and wings may be left whole. Refrigerate in shallow containers. Exception: Cooked turkeys with the USDA inspection seal on the packaging have been processed under controlled conditions. Follow package directions for reheating and storing.

#### Handling Leftovers

Perishable foods should not be left out of the refrigerator for more than 2 hours. Refrigerate or freeze leftovers promptly in shallow containers. It is safe to freeze leftover turkey and trimmings -- even if you purchased them frozen. Wrap tightly for best quality.

### Call Toll-free For More Information

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline  
1(800) 535-4555

Washington, DC: (202) 720-3333  
TTY: (800) 256-7072

FSIS Web site: [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)

### Cooked Frozen Turkey; Side Dishes

#### Is USDA Inspection Seal Visible?

This seal on the label tells you the turkey was prepared in a USDA-inspected plant. Read and follow package directions for thawing, reheating, and storing.

#### No Handling Instructions on Label?

Follow these steps:

- Thaw the wrapped, cooked frozen turkey on a tray in the refrigerator. Allow about a day for every 5 pounds. Small packages such as stuffing, gravy, or potatoes will thaw in less time. Side dishes can go from freezer to oven.
- Once the cooked turkey thaws, eat it (either cold or reheated to 165°F) within 3 to 4 days (stuffing and gravy in 1 to 2 days).
- To reheat turkey, cut the meat off the bones. Slice breast meat. Legs and wings may be left whole.

#### Storage of Leftovers

Refrigerator (40°F or slightly below)

Cooked Turkey	3 to 4 days
Stuffing and Gravy	1 to 2 days
Other Cooked Dishes	3 to 4 days

Freezer (0°F or below)

Turkey slices/pieces, plain	4 mos.
Turkey covered with broth or gravy	6 mos.
Cooked poultry dishes	4 to 6 mos.
Stuffing and gravy	1 mo.

(Foods frozen longer remain safe but may become drier and lose flavor.)