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Douglas County Health Department Says Handle Turkeys Carefully

A couple of things should be considered before you gobble up that Thanksgiving turkey, according to Douglas County Health Director Dr. Adi Pour.

“The turkey is an American holiday favorite, but it’s not always the easiest bird to cook,” Dr. Pour said. “There are many things that can affect the time it takes to roast a turkey and there is the potential to make your family sick if you don’t follow some basic rules.”

The U.S. Department of Agriculture makes the following recommendations:

- If the turkey is frozen or stuffed it will take longer to cook.
- Ovens sometimes heat unevenly and the temperature may be inaccurate.
- Dark roasting pans cook faster than shiny metal pans.
- Cooking bags can cook your turkey faster, but a metal tent can slow the time.
- The size and shape of the pan can affect how heat circulates in the turkey.
- It is safest to cook the stuffing in a casserole and avoid the risk of bacteria.
- Always use soap and water to wash your hands, utensils, the sink and anything else that comes in contact with the raw turkey and its juices.

Roast the turkey at a minimum of 325 degrees Fahrenheit and heat it to a minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees. You may want to use a thermometer to check the innermost parts of the turkey’s thighs and wings and also test the thickest part of the breast to make sure your turkey is fully cooked.

“Even if your turkey has a pop-up temperature indicator, it’s best to test the inner parts of the wings and thighs with a food thermometer,” Dr. Pour said. “Then, remove all the stuffing from the bird.”

Once your turkey is safely cooked, it will carve easier if it stands for 20 minutes to allow its juices to first settle. For information on other methods for cooking a turkey, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854).

Happy Thanksgiving from the Douglas County Health Department!

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