



University of California
Cooperative Extension
Tulare County

Agriculture and Natural Resources



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FOOD SAFETY AND THE PRECOOKED HOLIDAY MEAL

Some cooks forego home-cooking a turkey altogether and choose to purchase precooked dinners. There are also basic safety measures for the safe handling of these holiday meals. If the dinners are to be picked up hot, keep the food hot. Keeping foods warm is not enough. Harmful bacteria multiply fastest in the "danger zone" between 40° and 140° F. Set the oven temperature high enough to keep the internal temperature of the turkey and side dishes at 140° F or above.

Eat the food within 2 hours of pickup.

When picking up cold turkey dinners, refrigerate them as soon as possible, always within 2 hours. Serve the meal within 1 to 2 days. Turkey may be eaten cold, but reheating a whole turkey is not recommended. To reheat, slice breast meat (legs and wings may be left whole), and heat turkey pieces and side dishes thoroughly to 165° F.

Perishable foods should not be left out of the refrigerator or oven for more than 2 hours. Refrigerate or freeze all leftovers promptly in shallow containers. It is safe to refreeze leftover turkey and trimmings even if they were previously frozen.

For additional food safety information about meat, poultry, or egg products, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline's toll-free number 1-800-535-4555; Washington D.C. area 202/720-3333. The toll-free number for the hearing impaired (TTY) is 1-800-256-7072. The Hotline is staffed by food safety experts,

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weekdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Eastern time. In addition, food safety information is available on the FSIS web site at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov>.

Source: Food Safety and Inspection Service, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250-3700. "USDA Teaches Turkey Basics for Safe Holiday Cooking." WASHINGTON, Nov. 8, 2001. <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/news/2001/tbasics.htm>

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