

3 Top Thanksgiving Safety Tips to Help Prevent Foodborne Illness

*By Linda F. Golodner
November 16, 2018*

I love Thanksgiving because it brings together good people and good food. Keeping my guests smiling all the way through Black Friday is important to me too. By that I don't mean tracking my guests' amazing savings on sale merchandise at the mall. I mean making sure that folks who joined me for the holiday don't contract a foodborne illness that shows up after the Thanksgiving feast. Here are my top three Thanksgiving safety tips to prevent foodborne illness:



1. Treat your raw meat and poultry (turkey, chicken, goose, or duck) as though it is covered with bacteria

While a bacteria-covered raw turkey is not a savory image, it is realistic. Assume your raw poultry is covered with bacteria, and you will understand how easily kitchen surfaces can become cross-contaminated. For example, rinsing your bird in the kitchen sink is not recommended because the spray of contaminated water resulting from the rinse can be deposited on nearby surfaces. If necessary, you can wipe the bird with a disposable paper towel. Bacteria in and on your bird [must be killed by cooking](#), so make sure the minimum cooking temperature (165 °F, the “kill” temperature for *Salmonella*) is achieved before pulling your bird out of the oven. The kill temperature for *Salmonella* is the same or higher than that for other pathogens that could be in raw poultry, such as *Campylobacter*, *E. coli*, *Listeria*, *S. typhi*, *Shigella*, and *V. cholera*. If present, all of these pathogens will be destroyed when the internal temperature of your bird reaches 165 °F.

2. Keep a dilute chlorine bleach solution on hand to sanitize kitchen surfaces

Good old household bleach can help you maintain a sanitary kitchen as you go about your inevitably hectic preparations. It's your best friend when it comes to food safety and avoiding cross-contamination. On Thanksgiving morning I prepare a dilute solution of chlorine bleach to sanitize surfaces touched by raw meats, fruits and vegetables, and I use it throughout my food preparation process. It's best to keep the affected surface wet with the solution for about two minutes (air-drying may provide that amount of time). Most people are surprised to learn it only takes 1 tablespoon of bleach¹ in 1 gallon of water to mix up a germ-busting solution. It's good for a day, but loses strength after that.

3. Arrange the contents of your refrigerator as carefully as you would your guests around the table

In the days leading up to Thanksgiving, many of us will park our birds in the fridge until it's time to start cooking. I would no sooner station my bird on an upper refrigerator shelf than put two five year olds next to each other at the dining table. Why? Bacteria-laden juices from the poultry could easily drip onto food on shelves below. And speaking of the refrigerator, remember to get all the leftovers from the big meal into it within two hours of serving to help prevent spoilage. The temperature of your refrigerator should be no less than 32 °F and no more than 40 °F.

Bonus Tip: Remember to [wash your hands](#) thoroughly before, during, and after preparing food.

Here's to a Happy Thanksgiving and smiles all around the table and beyond!

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¹ Most household bleach available is 6% strength.