



Robert P. Astorino, Westchester County Executive

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **SERVE A TASTY TURKEY THIS THANKSGIVING Westchester County Health Department offers safe holiday cooking tips**

Whether your Thanksgiving plans include preparing and serving a festive meal or dining out, the Westchester County Department of Health has expert advice to help keep you and your loved ones healthy this holiday weekend.

“After you greet your guests or read a menu, and before you take that first bite, thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water to avoid ingesting a serving of germs along with your dinner,” said Sherlita Amler, MD, Commissioner of Health. “As flu season approaches, practicing good hand hygiene is always a good idea.”

“The chef, all kitchen helpers and guests should wash hands frequently, cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when they cough or sneeze or cough or sneeze into their elbow if one is not available, and avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth,” she added.

Follow these seven tips to safely serve your holiday meal:

- 1. Clean:** - The number one tip to safely prepare your holiday meal in your home is to keep everything clean.
  - Thoroughly wash hands with water and soap for 20 seconds, (Hum the Happy Birthday song twice), before and after handling any food. Make sure that your little chefs do the same!
  - Use paper towels to dry hands and surfaces. Rags and sponges can spread bacteria around your kitchen.
  - Wash all food-contact surfaces (cutting boards, dishes, utensils, countertops) with hot, soapy water or sanitize them in your dishwasher before and after preparing each food.
  - Rinse fruits and vegetables thoroughly under cool running water, (even if being cooked) and use a produce brush to remove surface dirt.
- 2. Thaw** - Never defrost a turkey by leaving it out at room temperature.
  - Allow 24 hours for every 5 pounds to thaw a frozen turkey in the refrigerator.
  - To avoid cross contamination, don't place a thawing turkey or any raw meat, (even if commercially wrapped), where it could drip on any ready-to-serve foods such as fresh fruit or vegetables that won't be cooked before serving.
- 3. Separate and Prepare** - Bacteria on raw poultry can contaminate your hands, utensils, and work surfaces as you prepare the turkey.

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- Use a separate cutting board for all raw meat and poultry preparation.
  - Keep the raw turkey away from vegetables and side dishes that won't be cooked.
  - Wash hands, surfaces, and utensils after they touch raw poultry using hot soapy water to avoid spreading harmful bacteria when preparing food.
- 4. Stuff Safely** - Many food borne outbreaks have been caused by stuffed, roasted turkey. That's because it takes a long time for heat to penetrate deep into the cavity, so bacteria can survive inside the bird.
- Bake stuffing separately in a shallow pan, where it can quickly reach 165°F.
  - If you must stuff the bird, do it right before you put it in the oven.
- 5. Cook** -Turkeys should be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165°F. How long it will take depends on oven temperature, temperature fluctuation and turkey weight.
- Insert a 0 to 220 degree probe thermometer deep into the turkey's thigh.
  - If you stuff your turkey, use the probe to make sure the internal temperature of the stuffing is at least 165 degrees.
- Safely Chill and Store Leftovers** - To avoid food borne illness, refrigerate leftover turkey, stuffing, etc., within two hours of the time you remove it from the oven.
- Cool soups and stocks in the refrigerator, uncovered in shallow pans. After they reach refrigerator temperature, transfer them to large covered containers.
  - Be sure not to pack your refrigerator so tightly that the cool air can't circulate.
  - Avoid filling containers with food deeper than four inches and then stacking multiple containers on top of each other. Once the food is cooled to under 45°F it's safe to stack.
- 6. Reheat** – Leftovers, including turkey meat, stuffing and stock should be reheated to at least 165°F before serving. (Make sure to use your metal stem probe thermometer to check!)

For more food preparation safety tips, go to [www.westchestergov.com/health](http://www.westchestergov.com/health), like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/wchealthdept](http://www.facebook.com/wchealthdept) or follow us on Twitter @wchealthdept. The health department can be reached at (914) 813-5000.