

Christmas food hygiene

Christmas food hygiene tips and how to cook your turkey safely.

There are an estimated 2.4 million cases of [food poisoning](#) in the UK each year. Whether cooking at home, or reusing leftovers, it's important to maintain good food hygiene at Christmas by following the '4Cs' of [cleaning](#), [chilling](#), [cooking](#) and avoiding [cross-contamination](#).

Christmas is a significant period of food waste. [Love Food Hate Waste](#) estimate over 100,000 tonnes of edible poultry, 96,000 tonnes of carrots and 710,000 tonnes of potatoes are thrown away each year in the UK.

Thinking hygienically when storing, cooking, reusing and freezing food will help keep your Christmas safe and minimise food waste over the festive period.

Christmas food shopping

Take enough bags for your Christmas food shop so that you can keep raw and ready-to-eat food apart. To prevent cross-contamination, store raw meat, fish and shellfish separately from ready-to-eat food and vegetables. Keep these covered on the bottom shelf of your fridge.

When food shopping over the Christmas period, it is important to understand the difference between best before and use-by dates to effectively plan your meals, get food to last longer, and make sure you're not throwing away food unnecessarily.

TIPS

[Best before](#) is about quality: food will be safe to eat after this date, but may no longer be at its best. [Use-by](#) is about safety: food should not be eaten, cooked or frozen after this date, as it could be unsafe.

Check your fridge is set at 5°C or below. Test this with a fridge thermometer. As long as your food is within its use-by date, it will stay fresher for longer. For the use-by date to be a valid guide, you must carefully follow storage instructions.

How to defrost your turkey

If your turkey is frozen, check the guidance on the packaging in advance. Some turkeys can be cooked from frozen if the manufacturer's instructions say so.

Do not defrost your turkey at room temperature. Always defrost your turkey in a container large enough to catch any juices to avoid cross-contamination. A typical large turkey weighing 6-7kg

could take as much as 4 days to fully defrost in the fridge. If there are no instructions for defrosting your turkey, you can work out yourself how long it will take to thaw completely. In a fridge, allow around 10-12 hours per kg.

If your turkey is not fully defrosted before cooking, it may cook unevenly. This means harmful bacteria can survive the cooking process and you will be at risk of food poisoning.

How to cook your turkey

Do not wash raw turkey before cooking. Washing raw meat spreads germs onto your hands, clothes, utensils and worktops. Thorough cooking will kill any bacteria present.

When cooking your turkey, always check the advice on the packaging and follow the instructions provided. The cooking guidelines will be based on a bird that is not stuffed.

Cook your stuffing in a separate roasting tin, not inside the turkey. A stuffed turkey will take longer to cook and may not cook thoroughly if it has not reached the correct temperature throughout.

To work out the cooking time for your turkey, check the retailer's instructions on the packaging. If there are no cooking instructions, in an oven preheated to 180°C (350°F or Gas Mark 4):

- allow 45 minutes per kg plus 20 minutes for a turkey that weighs under 4.5kg
- allow 40 minutes per kg for a turkey that weighs between 4.5kg and 6.5kg
- allow 35 minutes per kg for a turkey weighs over 6.5kg

Other birds need different cooking times and temperatures:

- goose should be cooked in a preheated oven at 200°C (400°F or Gas Mark 6) for 35 minutes per kg
- duck should be cooked in a preheated oven at 200°C (400°F or Gas Mark 6) for 45 minutes per kg
- chicken should be cooked in a preheated oven at 180°C (350°F or Gas Mark 4) for 45 minutes per kg plus 20 minutes

Check the temperature of the thickest part of the bird, between the breast and the thigh, using a temperature probe.

The temperature needs to reach one of the following combinations to make sure it has been cooked properly:

- 60°C for 45 minutes
- 65°C for 10 minutes
- 70°C for 2 minutes
- 75°C for 30 seconds
- 80°C for 6 seconds

Remember to fully clean the temperature probe or cooking thermometer after each use to avoid cross-contamination.

Reusing your leftovers

Reuse and reinvent your leftovers in different ways. Cool and cover your leftovers, and put them in a fridge or freezer within one to two hours. Splitting leftovers into smaller portions will cool food quicker and help portion control.

You can freeze cooked turkey, other cooked meat and meals made from cooked and frozen meat. Once defrosted, you should eat the food within 24 hours. You can also use previously cooked and frozen turkey to make a new meal, such as a turkey curry.

[Love Food Hate Waste](#) have various creative recipes and ideas for how to make your Christmas leftovers go further.

Freezing your leftovers

Freeze and defrost any leftovers for future dishes. Freezing acts as a pause button. It is safe to freeze food right up until the use-by date.

You can freeze most food. This includes raw and cooked meats, fruit, potatoes (after boiling for five minutes), grated cheese, and eggs.

When food defrosts, its core temperature rises. This provides the ideal conditions for bacteria to grow if left at room temperature. It is best to defrost food slowly and safely in the fridge.

You can also defrost your leftovers thoroughly in a microwave. Make sure you re-heat until steaming hot. Once the food is defrosted eat within 24 hours.