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# Food Safety Facts

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Food Safety  
and Inspection  
Service

## Turkey Basics: Stuffing

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Information for Consumers

Revised September 2003

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### Food Thermometer Essential

Cooking a stuffed turkey is riskier than cooking one not stuffed. Harmful bacteria can survive in stuffing that has not reached the safe temperature of 165 °F, possibly resulting in foodborne illness. Therefore, it is essential that you always use a food thermometer to check the temperature of the stuffing.

For safety and uniform doneness, cook stuffing separately in a casserole.

### Preparing Stuffing Safely

The ingredients for the stuffing can be prepared ahead of time. Keep wet and dry ingredients separated; chill. Mix wet and dry ingredients just before putting stuffing into a casserole or filling the turkey cavity. The stuffing should be moist, not dry, since heat destroys bacteria more rapidly in a moist environment.

### Cooking Stuffing Safely

The safest way to cook stuffing is in a casserole in a 325 °F oven. The internal temperature of the stuffing must reach 165 °F.

### Stuffing Your Turkey

If you choose to stuff your turkey, make sure it is stuffed loosely.

Cook the turkey immediately after stuffing. Use a food thermometer to check the temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and in the center of the stuffing. Even if the innermost part of the thigh has reached a safe internal temperature of 180 °F, the center of the stuffing inside the turkey may not have reached 165 °F and can cause foodborne illness. Continue to cook the stuffed turkey until the stuffing has reached 165 °F.

### Standing Time

For quality, you may choose to let the turkey stand for 20 minutes to let juices set. If your turkey is stuffed, the temperature of the stuffing will also continue to rise during this time. Remove all the stuffing from the turkey immediately after standing time.

### Handling Leftovers Safely

Refrigerate stuffing in shallow containers. Use leftover stuffing within 1 to 2 days for best quality.

## **A Word About Buying Stuffed Turkeys**

We do not recommend buying stuffed turkeys without the USDA or state mark of inspection.

Turkeys purchased stuffed and frozen with the USDA or state mark of inspection on the packaging are safe because they have been processed under controlled conditions. These turkeys should not be thawed before cooking. Follow package directions for handling.

### **For further information, contact:**

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline:

1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)

1-800-256-7072 (TTY)

E-mail: [mph hotline@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:mph hotline@fsis.usda.gov)

FSIS Web site: [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)

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