

Safe food preparation for turkey dinner

As many residents will be gathered around the dinner table with family and friends this weekend, Alberta Health Services has some advice to help make your holiday feast both happy and safe.

Dr. Gerry Predy, Senior Medical Officer of Health for Alberta Health Services, says safe food handling practices must be kept in mind to reduce the risk of food-borne illnesses caused by salmonella.

"Every year, there are reports of salmonella infection cases, most of which were caused by improper handling, preparation, and storage of food," says Dr. Predy. "Turkey and other poultry are sometimes contaminated with salmonella bacteria, so it is important that people take care while preparing these foods."

Dr. Predy recommends the following tips for a safe and enjoyable holiday meal:

- When purchasing a turkey, ask that it be put in a separate bag to prevent juices from dripping on other foods.
- When you get home, freeze the turkey or refrigerate it at 4° C or colder.
- Thaw a frozen turkey in a refrigerator. A 10-kg turkey will take about four days to thaw.
- If you have to thaw the turkey outside the refrigerator, keep it in its original wrap and immerse it in cold water (changing it every 30 minutes) until the meat is pliable.
- Once thawed, wash the turkey thoroughly with cold water and drain.
- Prepare and cook stuffing separately from the turkey.
- Work surfaces and equipment that have come in contact with raw poultry should be cleaned with hot soapy water before coming in contact with other foods.
- Use a meat thermometer to ensure the turkey is thoroughly cooked – test the fleshiest part of the thigh to see that the internal temperature is at least 85° C/185° F.
- If you don't have a meat thermometer, test the turkey's hip joint. If it moves easily, the thigh muscle is soft, and the juices run clear, then the bird is ready.
- Serve the cooked bird within 30 minutes of removing it from the oven.

Refrigerate leftovers as soon as possible and use within four days. Stuffing and gravy should be used within two days.

The symptoms of salmonella infection usually appear six to 72 hours after eating contaminated food, and include mild to severe diarrhea, abdominal cramps, fever, and occasionally vomiting. If symptoms persist or are severe, consult a physician.

Residents with any other health-related concerns can call Health Link Alberta to speak to a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at 780-408-LINK (5465) or outside the local calling area, toll free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465).

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.5 million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.