

## HOLIDAY FOOD SAFETY

The Ohio Department of Agriculture's food safety experts encourage consumers to use common sense when preparing and storing holiday meals and leftovers. The following guidelines can protect your family from the possibility of food borne illness. In general, perishable food should not be left out for more than two hours, because harmful bacteria multiply quickly at room temperature. Leftovers should be stored in shallow containers in the refrigerator to allow for faster cooling.

### 1. Turkey

Be sure the turkey is completely thawed before cooking. Always thaw meat or poultry in the refrigerator, and never on the counter top. To ensure safety and doneness, use a meat thermometer to check the internal temperature of the turkey. A whole turkey should reach 180° F, measuring the temperature in the thigh. If cooking a turkey breast alone, the temperature should reach 170° F.

**Leftovers: Refrigerate leftover turkey at 40° F or cooler, and it will last three to four days. Turkey can be frozen, and it will maintain its flavor for up to 6 months. Wrap it well to prevent freezer burn.**

### 2. Stuffing

Do not cook the stuffing inside the turkey if you do not have access to a meat thermometer. Do not rely on the pop-up type of thermometer that often comes on the turkey to indicate doneness of stuffing. The center of the stuffing in the turkey should reach 165° F. Test the temperature of the stuffing at several different points, since it can cook unevenly.

**Leftovers: Refrigerate leftover stuffing at 40° F or cooler. It will last only 48 hours.**

### 3. Vegetables

The more acidic the vegetable, the longer it will keep in a refrigerator. The acidity helps curb bacterial activity.

**Leftovers: Cooked vegetables are perishable foods and should be refrigerated at 40° F or cooler. Green beans, corn, mashed potatoes, and peas are not very acidic so keep them in the refrigerator no longer than two to three days.**

### 4. Fruits and Desserts

As with vegetables, the more acidic the fruit or dessert, the longer it will keep in a refrigerator.

**Leftovers: Highly acidic fruit dishes, such as cranberries, can keep in the refrigerator for four to five days. Desserts such as fruit pies can remain in the refrigerator for two to three days. Pumpkin pie must be refrigerated at 40° F or cooler. Check the label on commercially baked pies for safe storage requirements.**

### 5. Egg Nog

Egg nog is a perishable item and must be refrigerated. If making homemade egg nog, do not use raw eggs.

**Leftovers: Store egg nog in the refrigerator at 40° F or cooler.**

For more information, contact the Ohio Department of Agriculture Division of Food Safety at 1-800-282-1955 or the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555.