

2 Ways to Safely Thaw Your Holiday Turkey

Refrigerator Thawing

- Set refrigerator to 40° F or lower
- Allow about 24 hours per 4-5 pounds of turkey
- Place turkey in a container to prevent juices from dripping onto other foods
- Place turkey and container on the bottom shelf of your refrigerator
- Cook within 1-2 days

Thawing Times

4 lbs to 12 lbs – 1 day to 3 days
12 lbs to 16 lbs – 2 days to 4 days
16 lbs to 20 lbs – 4 days to 5 days
20 lbs to 24 lbs – 5 days to 6 days

Cold Water Thawing

- Allow about 30 minutes per pound
- Place turkey in leak-proof plastic bag to prevent cross-contamination and watered-down turkey
- Submerge bagged turkey in cold tap water
- Change tap water every 30 minutes to keep it cold
- Cook immediately

Thawing Times

4 lbs to 12 lbs – 2 hours to 6 hours
12 lbs to 16 lbs – 6 hours to 8 hours
16 lbs to 20 lbs – 8 hours to 10 hours
20 lbs to 24 lbs – 10 hours to 12 hours

Dangers of Countertop Thawing

Turkey is safe from harmful bacteria growth while frozen. When it begins to thaw, bacteria starts to grow.

Keeping foods at a safe temperature is necessary to prevent bacteria growth. A frozen turkey left on the kitchen countertop for more than 2 hours is no longer at a safe temperature.

While the inside of the turkey on the countertop may still be frozen, the temperature on the outside of the turkey will enter the “Danger Zone” ranging from 40° F to 140° F. This is the ideal temperature range for bacteria to grow.



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Hendricks County Health Department

For more information on holiday food safety, visit FoodSafety.gov or contact the Hendricks County Health Department at (317) 745-9217.

Source: United States Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service. (2013). Turkey Basics: Safe Thawing.

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/poultry-preparation/turkey-basics-safe-thawing/CT_Index