FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nov. 10, 2026

Amy Phelps, Public Information Officer

Amy.j.phelps@wv.gov

Cell phone: 304-588-9697

Holiday cooking safety tips

As the holidays approach, family dinners are at the front of everyone's mind, especially turkey for Thanksgiving. The Environmental Health department of the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department has some food safety tips for the holidays.

"We want all of the Mid-Ohio Valley to follow food safety guidelines so they can enjoy their Thanksgiving dinner,," said Lisa DeVaughn, Environmental Health director.

Turkeys should thaw in the refrigerator, 24 hours for every 5 pounds. A cold water bath may be used for 30 minutes per pound. The turkey should NEVER be thawed in hot water or left out on the counter.

Washing or rinsing your turkey increases the risk of spreading germs to other food.

Stuffing the turkey is not recommended - it takes longer to cook to the proper temperature of 165-degrees for both bird and stuffing. Cook the stuffing in a separate dish.

Cook turkeys breast-side up at a minimum of 325-degrees. If you choose to use an oven bag, use manufacturer instructions for how long to cook. Approximately, it should take:

- 8-12 pound turkey: 1 1/2 to 2 hours
- 12 to 16 pound turkey: 2 to 2 1/2 hours
- 16-20 pound turkey: 2 1/2 to 3 hours
- 20-24 pound turkey: 3 to 3 1/2 hours

The turkey must reach 165-degrees as measured by a food thermometer. Check the temperature in the thickest part of the breast, the innermost part of the thigh and the innermost part of the wing.

A whole turkey can be cooked by the deep fat frying method provided the turkey is not stuffed and has been completely thawed. The turkey should be 12 pounds or less.

Select a cooking vessel large enough to completely submerge the turkey in oil without it spilling over. The oil should cover the turkey by 1 to 2 inches. To determine the amount of oil needed, do a preliminary test using water. Place the turkey in the cooking utensil and add water to cover. Then remove the turkey and measure the amount of water. This is the amount of oil needed.

Select a safe location outdoors for deep fat frying a turkey. Heat the cooking oil to 350°F. Slowly and carefully lower the turkey into the hot oil. Monitor the temperature of the oil with a thermometer constantly during cooking. Never leave the hot oil unattended. Allow approximately 3 to 5 minutes per pound cooking time. Remove turkey from the oil and drain oil from the cavity. Check the temperature of turkey with a food thermometer to make sure it has reached 165 degrees.

When the turkey is done, place it on a sturdy tray lined with paper towels. The skin can be golden to dark brown to almost black. Let it rest about 20 minutes before carving.

Allow the used oil to cool before pouring it into containers for refrigerator storage. The oil can be reused if it is strained, covered, and used within a month.

A whole turkey can also be grilled, provided the turkey is not stuffed and has been completely thawed. During grilling, a turkey cooks by indirect heat in an outdoor covered gas or charcoal grill and a pan of water is placed beneath the grilling surface to catch the fat and juices that drip. Cooking is done by the hot, smoky, steamy air.

Begin with clean equipment and a good quality charcoal. Build a pyramid of charcoal to one side. Ignite the charcoal, and let the coals get red hot. Place an appliance thermometer on the food rack to monitor the air temperature inside the grill. When the charcoal has developed white powdery ash—about 20 to 30 minutes—and the air temperature reaches 225 to 300°F, place a drip pan with water in it to create moist, hot steam for cooking, in the center of the grill beneath where the turkey will be set and carefully push the hot coals evenly around the edge. Position the grill rack and place the prepared turkey on it (breast side up). Then place the cover on the grill.

Replenish with about 15 briquettes every hour as needed to maintain 225 to 300°F. If desired, add water-soaked hardwood or fruitwood, in the form of chunks or chips, to add flavor to the turkey as it is cooking. Do not use a softwood (pine, fir, cedar, or spruce) because it gives the food a turpentine flavor and coats it with a black pitch or resin.

Cooking times depend on many factors: the size and shape of the turkey, the distance from the heat, temperature of the coals and the temperature of the outside air. Remember, the turkey is done when the food thermometer reaches 165°F in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. Estimate 15-18 minutes per pound if using a covered grill.

Refrigerate any leftovers within 2 hours of cooking to prevent food poisoning. Cut the turkey into smaller pieces to cool quickly. Use leftover turkey and any dishes made with it within 3 days. Freeze turkey to store it for longer. Reheat all leftovers to at least 165-degrees.

If you have questions, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, at 1-888-674-6854. You can also chat live at ask.usda.gov. On Thanksgiving Day, the hotline is available from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Visit www.movhd.com/gobble for more Thanksgiving food safety tips, as well as fire safety tips while cooking.

###

The Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department serves Wood, Wirt, Calhoun, Pleasants, Ritchie and Roane Counties. The offices are open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Visit the website, movhd.com for more information. Follow them at Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department MOVHD on Facebook and @MOVHealthDept on Instagram and Twitter.