



## Don't wash that turkey

You might think that washing something makes it clean. After all, we wash our hands, our clothes, our dishes, our cars, and our bodies. We are even reminded, now more than ever, to wash our fruits and vegetables before eating or cooking. But what about our meats? How could it be wrong to wash something?

A common misconception is that washing or rinsing your meat before cooking will make it clean and free of bacteria. Some consumers want to rinse their meat or poultry under running water or soak it in a container of salt water, lemon juice, or vinegar. However, the USDA does not recommend rinsing and/or soaking raw beef, poultry, pork, lamb, or veal. Bacteria in raw meat products and their juices can spread to other foods and surfaces in the kitchen when you rinse them. This is called cross-contamination. Research from USDA has found that rinsing or washing raw meat and poultry increases the risk for cross-contamination in the kitchen, which can lead to foodborne illness. This is especially true for turkeys because of their size. It's difficult to wash without splashing nearby food or countertops and causing cross-contamination.

Cooking meat and poultry to the proper temperature is the only way to destroy bacteria. Washing isn't necessary, and you shouldn't do it. Use a metal stem thermometer to check for proper internal temperature. Remember to clean, separate, cook, and chill when handling turkey.

- Clean
  - Wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling turkey.
  - Wash and sanitize cutting boards, knives, countertops, and sink before and after preparing turkey.
  - Use paper towels to clean and sanitize kitchen surfaces. If you use cloth towels, wash them often in the hot cycle of your washing machine.
- Separate
  - Store turkey on lower shelves in the refrigerator to avoid cross-contamination of other foods.
  - Use separate cutting boards for turkey and fresh produce.
  - Never place cooked food on a plate that held raw turkey.
- Cook
  - Cook turkey to an internal temperature of 165 degrees F. Use a metal stem thermometer to check the temperature in the thickest part of the breast and thigh.

- Reheat leftovers to 165 degrees F.
- Chill
  - Thaw turkey in the refrigerator, under cold water, or in the microwave followed by immediate cooking.
  - Refrigerate or freeze leftovers within two hours.

### **Reference**

Washing Food: Does it Promote Food Safety? <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/washing-food-does-it-promote-food-safety/washing-food>

**Source:** Annhall Norris, Extension Specialist for Food Safety and Preservation

Copyright © 2020 for materials developed by University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension. This publication may be reproduced in portions or its entirety for educational or nonprofit purposes only. Permitted users shall give credit to the author(s) and include this copyright notice.

Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.