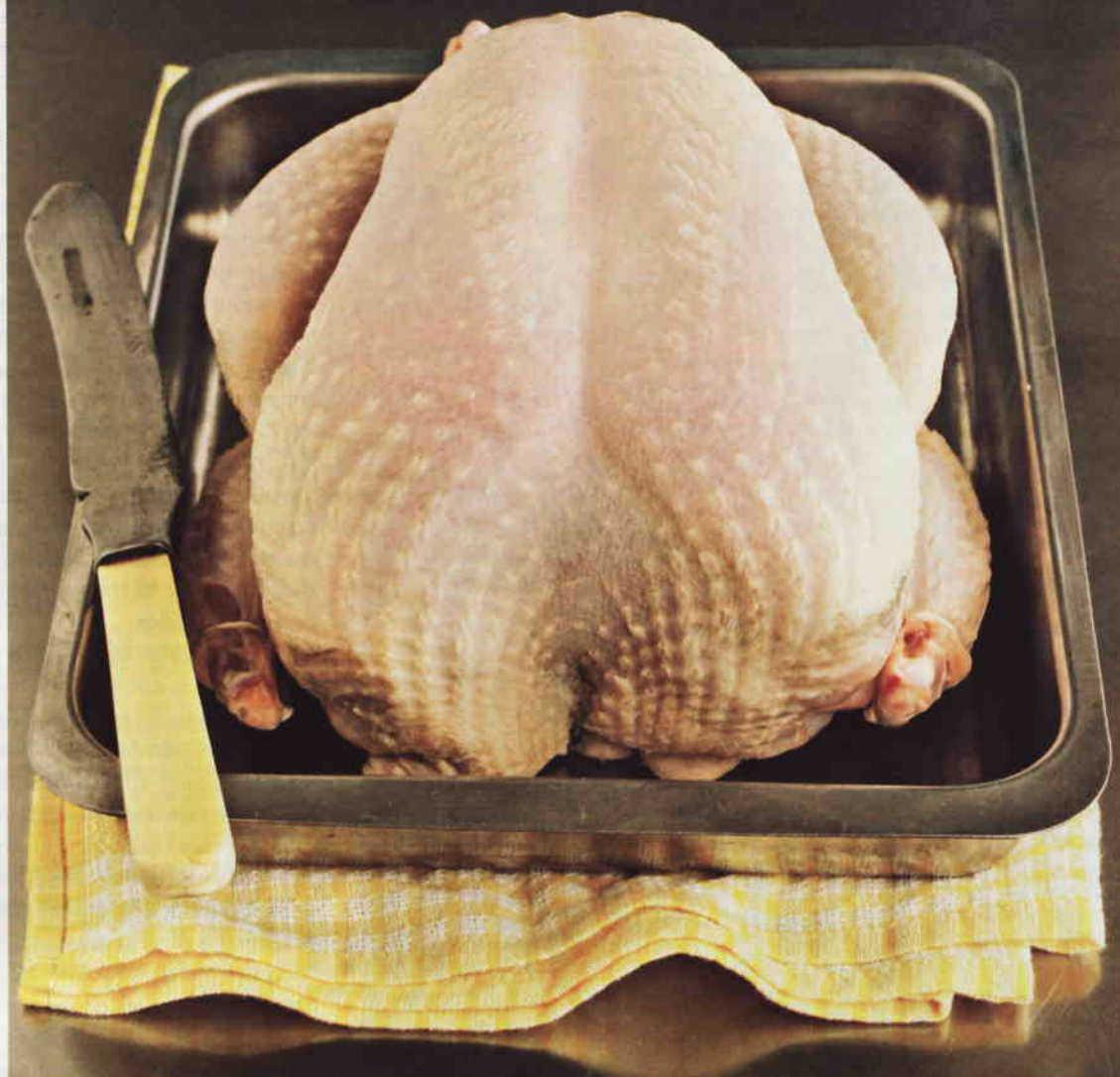


How **SAFE** is your holiday kitchen?



We tracked one woman's food-safety blunders while she made her Turkey Day feast. Learn from her mistakes this holiday season. *By Kate Ashford*

FOR ME, PUTTING TOGETHER A THANKSGIVING DINNER is about as relaxing as sitting in holiday traffic. But I thought I had a pretty good handle on the food-safety rules: Don't chop the veggies on the same cutting board you used for the bird. Check. Use a meat thermometer. Got it. But it turns out there are as many ways to commit food felonies as there are *Law & Order* spin-offs. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that there are 76 million cases of foodborne illness in the United States every year, resulting in 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths. I found out at least part of the reason why when food-safety expert Elisa Zied, RD, author of *Feed Your Family Right!*, documented all of my misdeeds as I cooked my Thanksgiving meal. Luckily she gave me the 411 on the easy fixes. Welcome to the crime scene—my kitchen. ➤➤

My not-so-safe Thanksgiving, revealed



9 a.m.

Turkey time

Because I know working with raw meat is risky, I was very careful when prepping the turkey. I defrosted the bird in the fridge, and tried not to

grope other things in the kitchen as I man-handled it. Once it was in the oven, I washed everything the meat had touched, using hot soapy water. I felt like I was being overly cautious, but Zied said I was a meat-handling ace. Few people are, though. According to the Partnership for Food Safety Education (PFSE), more than 50 percent of people defrost meat at room temperature, where it can develop bacteria. And only a third always use a separate cutting board for meat to avoid getting raw juices on produce and other foods. Still, I'm confident I'll get through the day without slipping up. But not for long.



9:12 a.m.

Hand-washing gone wrong

My first violation: touching the faucet knobs as I went to wash my hands. Zied admonished me and told me to use a paper towel to

turn on the faucet instead. OK, easy enough. But to make matters worse, I didn't soap-up with warm water for the recommended 20 seconds (long enough to sing "Happy Birthday"). Washing any less than that, Zied says, is almost as bad as not washing at all—it's just not enough time to get rid of all the bacteria. I promised to do better next time.



10:09 a.m.

The onion incident

I got bonus points for planning to cook my cornbread stuffing in a separate pan rather than inside the turkey. Stuffing cooked in the bird rarely reaches the recommended safe temperature (165 degrees) and is, therefore, a bacteria breeding ground. But Zied stopped me as I started slicing an

onion to add to the mix. Apparently, I was supposed to wash the onion *before* cutting into it. It seems that the knife can pick up bacteria from the skin and transfer it to the flesh as it passes through. Who knew? I protested, but Zied stood firm. Be sure that you rinse all fruits and veggies before cutting into them.



11:10 a.m.

Meat misdemeanor

I pulled the turkey out of the oven for a second temperature check, plunging the thermometer into the thickest part of the

thigh. I watched as the needle inched up to 180 degrees, the goal internal temperature. (Poultry is safe to eat at 165, but most recipes suggest a more appetizing 180 degrees.) But I neglected to wash the thermometer with hot soapy water after the first time I used it, which Zied said can spread any bacteria that exist in undercooked meat.



2:30 p.m.

Left out leftovers

So, finally, the food was ready, served, and eaten. The dishes were cleared. The postmeal coffee was all gone. By the time I started the cleanup, the stuffing

had been sitting out for a full three hours. *Oops.* Anything more than two hours, Zied said, is trouble. "After that first two hours, the bacteria start to multiply exponentially." There goes tomorrow's lunch.

3:00 p.m.

Time off for (relatively) good behavior

Despite my multiple offenses, I somehow managed to avoid a complete food-safety disaster. But it's obvious from my experience that there are plenty of ways to trip up and give both your guests and yourself a nasty case of food poisoning. You can learn from my mistakes, though. At right, my advice for staying out of trouble.

The letter of the law

These tips will help you get through Turkey Day without a case of food poisoning.

- Defrost turkey in the fridge.
- Wash anything touched by raw meat with hot soapy water.
- Use separate cutting boards, one for raw meat and one for produce.
- Use a paper towel to turn on faucet after handling meat.
- Wash hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap before and after handling food.
- Bake stuffing in a separate pan rather than inside the bird.
- Rinse fruits and veggies—even the ones you plan to peel—under running water.
- Use a meat thermometer to check that meat is cooked to at least 165 degrees.
- Don't let food sit out for more than two hours.
- Use leftovers within three days of cooking.
- Zap germs by microwaving a wet (nonsoapy) sponge for two minutes. 

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