

Stuffing: In or Out?

FROM A FOOD SAFETY PERSPECTIVE, THE ANSWER IS OUT

The USDA recommends *against* cooking stuffing inside the cavity of whole turkeys, for one main reason: bacteria. Warm, moist stuffing is an ideal environment in which bacteria can proliferate, potentially causing foodborne illness. Stuffing that's cooked inside the bird may not reach the correct temperature for killing off bacteria, even if the turkey itself reaches the correct temp. For safety, it's best to cook stuffing separately. (And a side benefit is that the turkey will cook more quickly without the stuffing.)

Here are a few tips for safely preparing stuffing. Should you decide to go ahead and stuff the big bird, follow the links below for more tips on how to reduce the risk.

- don't prepare *uncooked* stuffing ahead of time
- dry and wet ingredients for stuffing can be prepared separately, then refrigerated
- *fully prepared stuffing made ahead* should be cooked immediately, then chilled
- cook stuffing in an oven at a temperature setting no lower than 325°F
- use a food thermometer to make sure that the stuffing reaches at least 165°F
- refrigerate stuffing within 2 hours after cooking

For further information on safely cooking stuffing (and the turkey, too), visit the USDA website at <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/news-events/news-press-releases/how-cook-turkey-stuffing-safely> or <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/poultry>.

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