

Tips for protecting your family from Salmonella in ground turkey

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To kill Salmonella and other pathogens, ground turkey such as this should be cooked to an internal temperature of 165 F, says a Penn State food-safety expert.

As officials track a recent salmonella outbreak from ground turkey, consumers can take some simple precautions to protect their families, advises a food-safety expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

The most important tip is to acquire a food thermometer and use it when you cook burgers -- whether they are made from ground poultry or ground beef.

"It's really that simple," said Martin Bucknavage, extension food-safety specialist. "It is critically important that consumers realize that anytime they prepare any type of raw-meat product, it must be cooked to the

correct temperature.

"And whether cooking whole turkey or ground turkey, the proper cooking temperature is 165 degrees Fahrenheit."

Salmonella has made headlines around the country because Cargill Meat Solutions, of Springdale, Ark., is recalling 36 million pounds of ground-turkey products linked to a [Salmonella outbreak](#) that has infected about 80 individuals in 26 states, including Pennsylvania. Of those, 22 have been hospitalized and one has died.

Cargill announced the recall on Aug. 3 after its products were linked to an outbreak of a multi-drug resistant strain of Salmonella Heidelberg. It is one of the largest-ever recalls of poultry products, Bucknavage noted.

"The cases of illness have been widely distributed across the country, and there has been a long time period over which the cases occurred," he said. "So it has taken months for the regulators to get a handle on this outbreak. The Centers for Disease Control receive many reports each day, and it can be difficult to identify trends and then link those cases to a specific source."

The most common symptoms of [Salmonella infection](#) are diarrhea, abdominal cramps and fever, which occur within eight to 72 hours of eating a contaminated product and can last for three to five days. It can be life-threatening to the elderly, the young and those with weakened immune systems.

Raw meat, including raw beef, pork and poultry, often contains pathogenic bacteria such as Salmonella and Campylobacter. But the disease can be avoided, stressed Bucknavage. "Proper cooking kills the bacteria," he said. "But it is also important to note that the only way you can ensure that you have reached the required temperature is with a

cooking thermometer."

Unfortunately, Bucknavage added, too many people judge doneness of a cooked burger by the color and texture of the meat. "It is especially difficult with ground turkey, because the product appears to be a little drier and the color is a bit lighter -- you really can't go by those parameters," he said.

"The best way to do it is to stick a thermometer into the center of the meat and be sure it has reached 165 degrees."

Bucknavage also emphasized the need to prevent cross contamination when handling [raw meat](#) products -- especially ground poultry. "Ground turkey tends to be a little bit tacky, and it has a tendency to get all over your hands and the counter, knives and cutting board," he said.

"So it's important when you are handling ground [poultry products](#) to wash your hands thoroughly, as well as carefully wash all the surfaces that have come into contact with the meat to prevent cross contamination to other foods."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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