Turkey-Leftovers

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Thanksgiving is over and one of the best leftover meals awaits. Hot turkey sandwiches with leftover mashed potatoes and gravy, a little dressing on the side or on top, some cranberry sauce and another piece of pie. Thanksgiving leftovers can be delicious, but not so much when those leftovers aren’t cared for properly.

Bryan Severns, manager of food programs and services at Kansas State University Olathe, offers several storing and safety tips that are designed to keep Thanksgiving leftovers filled with flavor rather than a foodborne illness.

**Use it or lose it** - "One of the big problems I constantly see is that food sits out at room temperature all afternoon," Severns said. "When you're not keeping cooked food actively hot or cold, it's really only safe to sit out for about an hour — and that's pushing it. Cooked food should quickly be moved to the refrigerator. A cold garage also can work in a pinch if you can protect the food from pests”. Do not store stuffing inside a leftover turkey. Remove the stuffing from the turkey, and refrigerate the stuffing and the meat separately.

**Stored food can be out of sight but not out of mind** - Four is the important number to remember when it comes to storing leftovers. Storage time for cooked leftovers is 4 days; raw poultry and ground meats, 1 to 2 days. Generally, after four days, you should toss any leftovers or put it in the freezer. It becomes a health risk if you hang onto it. Once frozen, leftovers should be used within four months. After that length of time, frozen food begins to lose its quality.

**Reheats done right** - "Properly reheating leftovers is something most people have been doing wrong for years," Severns said. "While a cold turkey sandwich is fine, all other cooked food needs to be heated to 165 degrees Fahrenheit so that you kill the microorganisms that may have been growing on the food since it was refrigerated. That means if I want some green bean casserole, stuffing or gravy, they each need to reach 165 degrees to be safe.” Severns recommends using a calibrated food thermometer to ensure that food reaches 165 degrees Fahrenheit when it's reheated. Remember bacteria never takes a holiday, so it's important to be mindful this Thanksgiving of the four core messages of food safety in preparing your holiday meal - clean, separate, cook, and chill.

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