

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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While it's been in the news for some time now, many people didn't start really thinking about the avian influenza virus until they thought about buying a turkey for Christmas. Suddenly, sick birds are very important! Should you worry? Is the turkey likely to be a problem? Do you want a ham instead?

Avian influenza is unfortunately like many other viruses. It keeps changing. There are many varieties, or strains. There have been many others in the past, and will surely be more in the years to come. Most of them don't even make birds very sick. Some sicken birds but can't live in humans so they don't make us sick. Then there are the few that get really nasty and manage to jump from birds to people and on to other people. Often when they make the jump to people they also cause serious illness in people.

The new strain that has health officials so worried is one that makes the jump from birds to people, and that kills the people it gets into. So far it doesn't seem to be able to jump easily from people to people. That means that almost all the people who have gotten sick with avian influenza have been people who have been in contact with live, sick birds or their feces. These are either people who raise the chickens or ducks, or who sold the live birds, or who bought a live one and killed it for cooking. There are very, very few of us in this country who are killing and cleaning our own turkeys for dinner. That takes most of us out of danger immediately.

So far the dangerous strain has not been found in the US. We have had some of

its weaker cousins here in past years, but not yet this strain. Our poultry producers are very, very careful about protecting their flocks. Trucks are washed, people from one farm are not allowed in another farm, all to prevent the spread of disease. Processing plants are closed to outsiders. Once the birds are killed and frozen no virus is going to grow on them.

Like other viruses, this avian strain is killed with proper cooking. Luncheon meats made from poultry have all been cooked. Chicken soup in cans has been cooked. If you use normal good handling practices in your kitchen, and cook the turkey or chicken to a safe temperature, any virus or bacteria that might be there will be killed in the cooking.

For safe handling of chicken, turkey or duck, follow these steps. Keep the poultry refrigerated until ready to cook. Thaw frozen poultry in the refrigerator. When you open the package do not wash or rinse the meat. Studies have shown that in most cases washing does a better job of splashing bacteria around the kitchen than washing them down the drain. Just put the chicken into the roaster or pan. It's a better idea to bake any stuffing separately, but you can put an onion, orange or seasonings in the body cavity for flavoring.

Whether you roast or deep fry it, make sure you use a thermometer to indicate when the meat is properly cooked. Twisting a leg is not a safe way to tell if it is hot enough to kill bacteria or viruses. You can use a pop-up thermometer made for poultry, a meat thermometer that you insert when the bird goes into the oven, or an instant read one that you stick in when you think the turkey is done. A whole bird, chicken or turkey, should reach 180° F in the thickest part of the thigh. A breast should reach 170° at the thickest part.

So, if turkey or chicken is your favorite holiday meal, go ahead and enjoy it! Here's an interesting alternative to cranberry sauce for the roasted bird. The longer the stew simmers, the less alcohol from the brandy will be left. You can prepare this in advance, then reheat with the pan juices for serving.

### Savory Fruit Stew

1 ½ C apples, peeled and diced	½ C raisins
½ C dried cranberries	½ C dried apricots
2 bay leaves	1 C chicken stock or broth

(2 Tbsp brandy optional, or use water or more broth)

Combine ingredients in saucepan. Bring to boil and simmer over low heat 15 min. Refrigerate if holding longer than 2 hours. Add any juice from the roasting pan and reheat for serving.

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