



Ground Poultry and Food Safety

Many supermarket shoppers have discovered the ease and versatility of cooking ground chicken and ground turkey, available either fresh or frozen. Although these poultry products have a milder flavor than ground red meats, they can be substituted in ground meat recipes. Here are some answers to commonly asked questions about ground poultry.

1. What is ground poultry?

A. There is no established regulatory standard for “ground poultry,” “ground turkey,” or “ground chicken.” However, the regulations on “boneless poultry” apply — the product is composed in its entirety of the kind of poultry indicated and the form of the boneless poultry must be labeled. The identity of the raw material and the physical nature of the end product is used in identifying “ground” or “comminuted” poultry.

2. What cuts of poultry are permitted in ground poultry products?

A. The National Turkey Federation (NTF) has prepared guidelines for identifying “ground poultry” with which USDA is in general agreement. In essence, according to these guidelines, when a product is labeled as “ground (*kind*)” (for example, “ground turkey”), it is manufactured from whole muscle material such as drumstick, thighs, neck, etc., with all components, e.g. skin and adhering fat, in natural proportions, and the final product has a “ground” form as it emerges from the processing machinery.

3. How much fat is permitted in ground poultry?

A. There is no standard regulating the amount of fat that ground poultry may contain. However, since meat and skin can only be present in no more than natural proportions, the amount of fat contained is self-limiting. In general, it is about 10 to 15-percent fat by weight. A turkey carcass contains about 15% skin and a chicken carcass contains about 20% skin on the raw basis. **NO EXTRA FAT MAY BE ADDED.**

4. What does the color of the ground poultry indicate?

A. Color may be an indicator of the type of meat used in the product — darker pink means more dark meat was used and a lighter pink means more white meat was included (or skin was included). Color is a factor of the part of the carcass from which the meat is derived.

5. What are the labeling requirements for ground poultry?

A. Producers are not required to identify the cuts of poultry used for grinding on the label. If cuts are identified, *only* those cuts can appear in the product. Ground poultry can contain only muscle meat and skin with attached fat in natural proportions, and not other components, such as giblets. “Ground (*kind*)” meat means no skin is included. A package that is labeled “ground turkey meat” is just that — ground muscle meat with no skin included.

6. Are nutrition labels required on ground poultry products?

A. No. FSIS encourages voluntary nutrition labeling on these products, either as a label on the package or as point-of-purchase materials in the store. It is not mandatory. Providing the nutrient composition of these products, per serving, allows for product comparison and determining its contribution to the overall diet.

If a producer uses the terms “lean” or “extra lean” to describe his products then a nutrition label must be on the package and the information on the “Nutrition Facts” panel must support this claim. (These terms have been defined in the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act of 1990.)

7. Are safe handling labels required on ground poultry product?

A. Yes, as of May 27, 1994, USDA began requiring safe handling instructions on packages of all raw or partially cooked ground meat and poultry products. These mandatory safe handling instructions are an important educational tool. The instructions provide food handlers with critical food safety information when it is needed most — during distribution, at the point of purchase, and during preparation.

8. How should ground poultry be cooked, stored and handled?

A. Ground poultry and ground poultry dishes should always be cooked to 165 °F internal temperature as measured with a food thermometer; leftovers should also be reheated to 165 °F. Always wash hands with warm water and soap. Wash utensils, counters, cuttings boards and sink with soap and hot water to prevent cross-contamination of cooked food with raw products.

For safe storage times of ground poultry, see the following chart:

Storage Times		
TYPE	REFRIGERATOR (40° or below)	FREEZER (0° or below)
Uncooked ground poultry	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months
Cooked ground poultry	3 to 4 days	2 to 3 months

9. How should ground poultry be used?

A. Ground poultry may be substituted for ground beef or combined with ground beef in many recipes. The important thing is that it be cooked safely. Ground poultry patties, loaves or any combinations should be cooked to 165 °F. After cooking, refrigerate leftovers immediately. Separate into small portions for fast, safe cooling.

10. Is ground poultry the same as mechanically separated poultry?

A. No. Mechanically separated poultry (MSP) is a poultry food product produced by high pressure machinery that separates bone from poultry skeletal muscle tissue and other edible tissue by first crushing the bone and then forcing bone and tissue through a sieve or a similar screening device. The result is a blend of soft tissue with a paste-like consistency and a cake-batter form. The final paste-like material, has a physical form and texture that differs materially from other boneless chicken and turkey products that are deboned by hand.

In November 1995, USDA's FSIS issued a rule requiring labels to list mechanically separated poultry as an ingredient in processed products such as hot dogs and bologna as "mechanically separated chicken or turkey" instead of simply "chicken" or "turkey." This requirement went into effect on the labels of products that include MSP as an ingredient in November 1996. MSP is a safe and wholesome food product with nutritional characteristics similar to ground poultry. Because of its cake-batter texture, it is ideally suited for use in hot dogs, bologna, nuggets, patties, sausages and luncheon meat-type products.

Food Safety Questions?

Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline

If you have a question about meat, poultry, or egg products, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll free at **1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)**; TTY: 1-800-256-7072.



The Hotline is open year-round Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET (English or Spanish). Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day. Check out the FSIS Web site at www.fsis.usda.gov.

Send E-mail questions to MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov.

Ask Karen!

FSIS' automated response system can provide food safety information 24/7



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