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Top Ten Tips for Holiday Food Safety from the Illinois Poison Center

State's only poison center offers recommendations for a harm-free holiday season

(Chicago) November 24, 2014 - As families and friends across Illinois makes plans for their holiday feasts, the Illinois Poison Center (IPC) is offering its top ten tips for proper food handling techniques this season. According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 76 million people experience foodborne illness each year.

"Holidays are a time of celebration and joy, but holiday feasts can be tricky; home chefs are often preparing a meal they don't normally cook, and they're preparing it for a larger group than usual," said Dr. Michael Wahl, M.D., IPC Medical Director. "By following basic food safety preparation and storage tips, however, you can avoid foodborne illnesses and enjoy the festivities."

According to the IPC experts, the top ten ways to safe this season include:

1. Use a meat thermometer to confirm that meat, pork and poultry are properly cooked; visit www.foodsafety.gov for proper temperatures.
2. Keep preparation and storage areas, including countertops, stovetops and refrigerators, clean.
3. Wash hands with soap and warm running water for at least 15 to 20 seconds before preparing any foods, and especially after handling raw meat, poultry, fish or eggs.
4. Wash utensils between each use. Never reuse utensils without washing them, because dirty utensils can be a source of contamination.
5. Thaw meat and poultry in the refrigerator or microwave, *not at room temperature*. This may take several days for a large turkey.
6. Do not prepare food if you are sick or have any type of nose or eye infection.
7. Store raw food below cooked food in the refrigerator so it cannot drip onto and contaminate cooked food.
8. Use separate cutting boards for meats, poultry and fish.
9. To ensure that leftovers are safe the next day, properly seal and store food in the refrigerator as soon as possible.
10. If you are unsure about how long perishable food, particularly meat, poultry and dairy, have been left out, throw the items away to eliminate your risk of food poisoning.

"One of the biggest sources of foodborne illness during the holidays is salmonella from handling turkey and other poultry," said Wahl. "Salmonella bacteria can result from raw or undercooked poultry, and may be particularly harmful to people in poor health, young children and the elderly."

People who develop food poisoning may experience symptoms that include nausea, fever, vomiting, stomach cramps and diarrhea. Depending on the exact type of food poisoning, symptoms may last from several hours to several days.

The IPC is open 24 hours per day, seven days per week, including holidays. If you think you or someone you know has food poisoning, please call the IPC at 1-800-222-1222 for expert treatment recommendations.

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*The **Illinois Poison Center** is a nonprofit health service that provides the people of Illinois with comprehensive and trusted information and treatment advice on potentially harmful substances via a free, confidential 24-hour helpline staffed by specially trained physicians, nurses and pharmacists.*