For Immediate Release  
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**Sick of the Holidays? It May be Food Poisoning**  
*Food poisoning calls to Illinois Poison Center jump during holiday season*

(Chicago) – Food poisoning-related telephone calls to the Illinois Poison Center increase an average of 9 percent annually during the holiday season, according to experts at the statewide hot line. It is an annual trend the poison center is hoping to curb this year by reminding consumers about simple proper food safety preparation and storage.

“Preventing food poisoning is simple,” said Dr. Michael Wahl, managing medical director of the Illinois Poison Center. “Unfortunately, people often shift their regular routines during the holiday season, and proper food preparation and storage is often one of the first things to slip.”

Wahl notes that two of the biggest food poisoning culprits are unsafe handling of foods, such as meat, poultry and fresh eggs, and leaving food out too long. Both can have very serious health consequences.

**Food poisoning is serious risk**

Food poisoning is generally a mild illness that most commonly results from poor food handling practices. Symptoms can include fever, headache, diarrhea, stomach pains and vomiting. One or more of these symptoms often develop within a few hours to a few days of eating contaminated foods. Food poisoning can become serious for those individuals in poor health, and for the very young and the elderly. Potential sources of food poisoning include:

- Uncooked or undercooked meat, poultry or fish
- Defrosting meat or poultry on the counter at room temperature
- Cooking stuffing inside a turkey
- Dirty utensils, cutting boards, counter tops and other food preparation areas
- Unbaked cookie dough or cake batter

**Ways to keep safe from food poisoning**

Practicing basic food safety preparation and storage is the best way to protect against food poisonings. Prevent food poisonings by:

- Washing 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.
• Keeping preparation and storage areas clean; this includes counter tops, stovetops and refrigerators.
• Washing utensils between each use: never re-use utensils; this is a source of contamination
• Using a meat thermometer to confirm that meat, pork and poultry is properly cooked; visit www.foodsafety.gov for proper temperatures.
• Properly sealing and storing leftovers in the refrigerator as soon as possible. Leaving perishable foods, including meats and dairy products out longer than three hours significantly increases the risk of food poisoning-related illness. Throw food away if unsure of how long it has been sitting out.

Additional food safety and preparation information
The Illinois Poison Center offers free food safety information online at www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org. Other resources are available at www.homefoodsafety.org or from the United States Department of Agriculture offers information on safe food handling, storage and preparation through their meat and poultry hot line, 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854).

Getting help in an emergency
If you suspect food poisoning, do not wait for symptoms to appear. Contact the Illinois Poison Center immediately at 1-800-222-1222. Post this number in a highly visible and central location year-round.

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Editor's Note: Poison center experts are available for news media interviews. Contact the IPC public affairs at 312-906-6146 or 312-906-6142 to arrange an interview.

The Illinois Poison Center serves all of Illinois – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – via a national, toll-free number, 1-800-222-1222. Staffed by pharmacists, physicians, nurses and poison information providers, the IPC provides poison prevention information and treatment advice on household products, medication issues, alcohol and drug misuse, bites and stings and other poisonings.

The IPC is a program of the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council, an association comprising more than 140 hospitals and health care organizations working together to improve the delivery of health care services in the Chicago area.