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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 22, 2013- 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 food borne illness each year.

"While holidays are a time of celebration and joy, there are also many risks associated with food preparation particularly when handling turkey and other raw poultry," said Dr. Mike Wahl, IPC Medical Director. "Salmonella bacteria can result from undercooked poultry, and may be particularly harmful to people in poor health, young children and the elderly."

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 as dirty utensils can be a source of contamination.
5. Thaw meat and poultry in the refrigerator or microwave not at room temperature.
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 into 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.

People who have contracted salmonella or other 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.

"Thanksgiving feasts can be tricky; cooks are preparing a meal they don't usually cook and for large numbers of people. By following our basic food safety preparation and storage tips, you can avoid food borne illnesses and enjoy the festivities," said Wahl.

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 the IPC at call 1-800-222-1222 for expert treatment recommendations.

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The Illinois Poison Center is a non-profit 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 hotline staffed by specially trained doctors, nurses and pharmacists.