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Spend the Holidays with Family and Friends, Not the Bathroom
The IPC offers tips to avoid foodborne illness

As the holidays approach, families and friends across Illinois will make plans to celebrate the season together with a delicious meal. However, a helping of salmonella or staph at the Thanksgiving table can ruin a holiday feast faster than dry turkey or lumpy mashed potatoes. Many merrymakers do not realize that more than 76 million people experience foodborne illness each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The risk of getting sick can be especially acute around this time of year.

"Thanksgiving meals can be tricky; home chefs are preparing dishes they don't usually cook and for large numbers of people," says Michael Wahl, M.D., medical director, Illinois Poison Center (IPC). "Common sources of foodborne illness during the holidays include salmonella from handling turkey and other raw poultry and staph poisoning from improper food storage."

People who have contracted salmonella, or other food poisoning such as staph, 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.

Whether you're a five-star chef or an amateur hosting your first Thanksgiving, don't serve a side of salmonella with your turkey and gravy. Follow the IPC's top 10 tips for home chefs to avoid foodborne illness and keep guests from crying "fowl!"

1. Keep countertops, stovetops, refrigerators, and other food preparation and storage areas clean;
2. Do not prepare food if you are sick or have any type of eye or sinus infection;
3. Store raw food below cooked food in the refrigerator to avoid cross contamination;
4. Thaw meat and poultry in the refrigerator or microwave, not at room temperature;
5. Wash your 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;

6. Use separate cutting boards: one for meats, poultry and fish that could be contaminated with harmful bacteria and one for bread, fruits and vegetables that can be eaten without further cooking;
7. Wash cooking utensils after each use, and never reuse them, as dirty utensils can be a source of contamination;
8. Use a meat thermometer to confirm that meat and poultry are properly cooked, and visit <http://www.foodsafety.gov> for temperature guidelines;
9. Properly seal and store leftovers in the refrigerator as soon as possible; and
10. When in doubt, throw it out, especially when dealing with meat, poultry and dairy.

For more information on food safety and other topics from the IPC, [click here](#).

IPC experts are available to provide information and treatment advice 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, including holidays. If you suspect that you or someone you know has been exposed to a potentially harmful substance, please call the IPC at 800-222-1222. The call is free and confidential. For more information, visit the IPC's website: <http://illinoispoisoncenter.org>.

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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.