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Thanksgiving Safety: Don't Let Food Poisoning Gobble Up Your Good Time!

Cooking the Thanksgiving Day feast can be stressful for many reasons, especially when it comes to the turkey. Perhaps you find yourself cooking for Thanksgiving for the first time this year? For all of our seasoned chefs and first time bird cookers out there, here are some tips to ensure proper thawing, preparation and storing:

- Refrigerate or freeze perishable food within 2 hours of shopping or preparing.
- When thawing in the refrigerator, allow 24 hours for each 4-5 pounds of meat. Thawing meat on the counter at room temperature is not safe.
- Submerging the turkey in COLD tap water is also a method for thawing. Make sure the bird is in a leak-proof container and change the water every 30 minutes until thawed.
- Never place fresh fruit/vegetables or cooked food in the same container or on the same surface that raw food has touched.
- Always wash your hands after handling raw meat. Scrub hands, wrists, fingernails and in between fingers with soap for at least 20 seconds.
- Refrigerate or freeze leftovers immediately.

“One of the major issues over the holidays concerns improperly cooking stuffing that is placed inside the bird,” states Dr. Jill Michels, a Clinical Pharmacist and Director of the Palmetto Poison Center at UofSC’s College of Pharmacy. “Even if the turkey is cooked correctly, stuffing may not have reached the temperature necessary to kill potentially

harmful bacteria.”

Here are some pointers to ensure proper cooking techniques:

- For optimal safety, cook the stuffing outside the turkey in a casserole dish. If you place it inside the turkey, do so just after thoroughly cooking the turkey.
- Set oven temperature no lower than 325°F and make sure the turkey is completely thawed.
- Cook the bird breast-side up on a flat wire rack in a roasting pan 2 to 2-1/2 inches deep.
- Check the temperature at the meaty portion of the breast, thigh and wing. The safe minimum internal temperature is **165°F**.
- The USDA issues the following recommendations for cooking your Thanksgiving bird:
 - **8-12 pound birds should cook from 2 ¾ to 3 hours**
 - **12-14 pound birds should cook from 3 to 3 ¾ hours**
 - **14-18 pound birds should cook from 3 ¾ to 4 ¼ hours**

Food poisoning can present itself in different ways, but common symptoms include nausea/vomiting, diarrhea and fever that lasts longer than 48 hours. The Palmetto Poison Center is staffed by trained nurses and pharmacists who can provide expert information when food poisoning occurs. Don't hesitate if you feel there is an issue, one quick phone call will calm your turkey day woes faster than you can snap the wishbone.

Along with food safety concerns this year, don't forget homes may have more cleaners and hand sanitizers that may be left out where small children can access them. Make sure to store them out of reach and out of site to avoid any possible exposure that could potentially ruin your Thanksgiving feast.

The Palmetto Poison Center provides services to over 5 million residents in all 46 counties of South Carolina. Services are free, confidential and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. To contact the Palmetto Poison Center, call 1-800-222-1222. Please visit their website at *poison.sc.edu* for free materials, or follow the center on Facebook “Palmetto Poison Center.”