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SLVHD reminds residents to make food safety a holiday tradition

(Salt Lake County) – With Thanksgiving less than one week away, the Salt Lake Valley Health Department (SLVHD) is reminding county residents to make food safety a tradition and follow these basic safety tips in the preparation of their holiday meals.

“The holidays are a special time for families and friends and no one would want to spoil the season by giving someone a foodborne illness. Though it certainly has been done in the past, it’s one holiday tradition not worth keeping,” noted Bryce Larsen, food protection bureau manager for the SLVHD.

Restaurants and other food service establishments in Salt Lake County serve tens of thousands of meals every day. Health department food safety inspectors conduct thorough inspections by focusing on how food is handled, cooked and stored, and county residents can use these same guidelines to ensure a savory and safe Thanksgiving meal.

"Thanksgiving Day cooks, both expert and novice, should never take basic food preparation for granted. Cooking meat and poultry thoroughly, keeping it refrigerated or frozen before cooking, and washing hands and surfaces which come into contact with raw meat are precautions everyone should take to avoid bacteria that can cause foodborne illness," explains Larsen.

To help ensure a safer and happier holiday, the SLVHD offers the following guidelines for preparing your Thanksgiving meal safely:

- Keep raw meat and poultry, as well as their drippings, from coming into contact with other foods. Wash kitchen surfaces, cutting boards and utensils with hot, soapy water after preparing raw meat and poultry.
- Always wash hands with hot, soapy water immediately after touching raw poultry meat.
- Fresh uncooked turkey may be stored in your refrigerator for one to two days. Make sure it is wrapped carefully while being refrigerated.
- Keep packages of frozen poultry or meat frozen until use. Thaw poultry or meat in the refrigerator or microwave -- not on a counter or other surface at room temperature.
- Using a food thermometer, ensure that the center of the turkey breast and the center of the stuffing inside of a turkey are heated to at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit.
- If you do not have a thermometer, do *not* stuff the turkey. To see if an unstuffed turkey has been cooked adequately, pierce several parts of the turkey with fork. The juices should be clear, without any trace of pink coloring.

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- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Refrigerate leftovers immediately. Perishable foods should not be left at room temperature for longer than two hours.

There are many different types and causes of foodborne illness. Symptoms typically include fever, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. While mild in most cases, symptoms can be severe or even life-threatening. Incubation periods for different types of foodborne illnesses vary -- the amount of time between eating contaminated food and experiencing symptoms of a foodborne illness may range from a few minutes to several hours, days, and weeks.

Every year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 300,000 people in the United States are hospitalized and 5,000 die from foodborne illness. A staggering 76 million are sickened each year.

For more information on food safety visit the SLVHD website at www.slvhealth.org.

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