



# Harris County Hospital District

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## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Tips for a Safe Thanksgiving Meal that Will Leave Guests Happy, not Sick**

HOUSTON (Nov. 16, 2006) – Days before Thanksgiving the rush to put forth a feast starts. But if the cook isn't careful, their guests might get more than they bargained for and feel less than thankful to their host.

“The improper storing, cooking and serving of certain foods can lead to the growth of harmful bacteria – like salmonella, which can cause food borne illness,” said Dr. Louise Terrill, physician at the Harris County Hospital District's Settegast Health Center.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) an estimated 76 million food borne diseases occur each year in the United States. The majority of the cases are mild and cause symptoms for a day or two. CDC estimates there are 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths related to food borne diseases each year.

If turkey is your meal of choice for Thanksgiving, thawing the turkey completely before cooking is important and necessary to reduce the risk of food borne illnesses.

“If a turkey is not properly thawed, the outside of the turkey will be done before the inside, and the inside will not be hot enough to destroy disease-causing bacteria,” Terrill said. “The cook must allow the correct amount of time to properly thaw and cook the whole turkey.”

Tips to reduce risk of common food borne illnesses:

- **Clean:** Wash hands and food-contact surfaces often. Bacteria can spread throughout the kitchen and get onto cutting boards, knives, sponges and counter tops.
- **Separate:** Don't cross-contaminate. Don't let bacteria spread from one food product to another – especially from raw meat.
- **Cook:** Cook to proper temperatures. Foods are properly cooked when they are heated for a long time and at a high enough temperature to kill the harmful bacteria that cause food borne illness.
- **Chill:** Refrigerate promptly, cold temperatures keep most harmful bacteria from growing and multiplying.

“Food should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours,” Terrill said. “Keep track of how long foods have been sitting on the table and throw away anything that has been out longer than two hours. Before storing, remove leftover turkey meat from the bone, which fosters bacteria growth.”

The Harris County Hospital District is the public health care system for the nation's third most populous county. It provides more than 1.1 million health care visits each year to uninsured and underinsured residents of Harris County. The district operates Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, Quentin Mease Community Hospital, 12 community health centers, a dental center, eight school-based clinics, 13 homeless shelter clinics and four mobile health units.

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