



# NEWS RELEASE

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **DEC promotes food safety guidelines for illness-free holidays** *Preventing foodborne illness--not avian flu--should be biggest concern*

**November 15, 2005**--Practice safe food handling when entertaining and keep foodborne illness away this holiday season, advises the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

"People must take precautions to keep food safe, especially during frequent holiday dinner parties and buffets," said Kristin Ryan, DEC director of environmental health. "Foods left out for long periods are ideal bacteria breeding grounds."

While reports of H5N1 Avian Influenza have raised questions about the safety of eating poultry, whether raised at local farms, in backyard flocks or harvested by hunters, according to Ryan consumers can enjoy poultry and wild waterfowl during holiday celebrations provided it is properly handled and prepared. Hunters should not touch game that appears to be sick, behaving abnormally or found dead. Hunters should also wear gloves when handling and cleaning waterfowl. After handling game, hunters are advised to wash hands thoroughly with soap and water, taking care to avoid rubbing their eyes, and to clean all equipment and surfaces that come into contact with the game.

"Remember to use the safe food guidelines to prevent foodborne illness, which is a much greater risk than Avian Influenza," Ryan said.

The four most important steps to reduce the risk of foodborne illness are:

- **CLEAN**, wash hands and surfaces often;
- **SEPARATE**, don't cross-contaminate;
- **COOK**, to proper temperatures; and
- **CHILL**, refrigerate promptly.

Practice these steps for a safe, illness-free holiday: Wash hands with hot, soapy water before and after handling food and keep the kitchen, dishes, surfaces and utensils clean. Serve food on clean plates - never put cooked food on plates that previously held raw meat, poultry or seafood. Keep raw meat, poultry and seafood separate to ensure that juices will not cross-contaminate other foods. Cook foods thoroughly (Roast beef to 145°F for medium rare and 160°F for medium; whole poultry to 180°F, poultry breasts to

170°F and ground poultry to 165°F; all other meat, fish and ground red meats to 160°F.). Keep hot foods hot with crock-pots and warming trays at 140°F or warmer, and cold foods cold by placing dishes in bowls of ice at 40°F or colder.

For healthy adults, a bout of foodborne illness can seem like the flu, but it is serious for the very young, the very old, or those with poor immune systems. These few simple tips can prevent food poisoning from spoiling your holiday celebration.

For more information on food safety, visit DEC's website at: [www.dec.state.ak.us/eh/fss](http://www.dec.state.ak.us/eh/fss)

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**Background information on H5N1:** Cases of H5N1 infection in humans have only occurred from direct contact with infected poultry in Southeast Asia. The United States Department of Agriculture ensures no products or birds enter the United States from areas affected with the H5N1 infection. In Alaska, DEC tested domestic birds this summer and the University of Alaska Fairbanks and the U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center, working with state and federal wildlife agencies, collected samples from migratory birds. No sign of H5N1 influenza has been detected.