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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Talking Turkey**

**(Coldwater, MI)** Each Thanksgiving, millions of Americans look forward to enjoying family and friends while eating a turkey dinner with all the trimmings. But for too many people that delicious turkey dinner will also bring a nasty case of foodborne illness. According to Rebecca Burns, Environmental Health Director, "Food, kitchen utensils and even counters may become contaminated from raw foods like a turkey. This can lead to salmonella or other bacterial contamination. Be careful to handle and prepare your turkey properly this year."

To help protect you and your guests, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency offers the following thawing, preparing, stuffing and cooking tips for preparing a turkey.

Fresh turkeys should be used within two days of purchase. Frozen turkeys should be thawed completely before cooking. Never thaw your turkey at room temperature. Thawing turkeys must be kept at a safe temperature. The "danger zone" is between 40 and 140°F. Within this temperature range, bacteria can grow fast. A frozen turkey is safe indefinitely, but as soon as it begins to thaw, bacteria that may have been present before freezing can begin to grow again. Thaw your turkey in the refrigerator and allow 24 hours of thawing time for every 5 pounds. Thaw in a container to catch any raw juices that might leak out during thawing. You may also thaw your bird in cold water, making sure to change the water every half hour. Small birds may be

defrosted in the microwave. Be sure to turn the bird every 3-5 minutes to prevent cooking the wing tips.

Prepare your turkey on a clean, disinfected surface. Remember that bacteria present on raw poultry can contaminate your hands, utensils, sink and work surfaces as you prepare the turkey. If these areas are not cleaned thoroughly before working with other foods, bacteria from the raw poultry can then be transferred to other foods. After working with raw poultry, always wash your hands, utensils, sink and work surfaces before working with other foods.

Cook the stuffing outside the turkey in a casserole dish. However, if you place stuffing inside the turkey, do so just before cooking and use a food thermometer. Make sure the center of the stuffing reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F. Bacteria can survive in stuffing that has not reached 165°F, possibly resulting in foodborne illness. If you do stuff your bird, remove all stuffing immediately after cooking.

To cook the turkey, set the oven temperature no lower than 325°F and be sure the turkey is completely thawed. Place turkey breast-side up on a flat wire rack in a shallow roasting pan 2 to 2-1/2 inches deep. Check the internal temperature at the center of the stuffing and meaty portion of the breast or thigh, using a food thermometer. Cooking times will vary. The food thermometer must reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F. Let the turkey stand 20 minutes before removing all stuffing from the cavity and carving the meat. Be sure to refrigerate all leftovers within two hours of serving and store in small shallow containers to limit further opportunity for cross contamination.

Following these cooking guidelines can help you prepare a safe holiday dinner that everyone will enjoy. To find out more information about cooking turkey safely, go to the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency's website: <http://www.bhsj.org> and click on Frequently Asked Question Sheets – [Turkey Tips](#).

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