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**PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Seasonal Food Safety and Avian Flu

With Thanksgiving just around the corner, the Pinellas County Health Department encourages everyone to follow important food safety measures during the holiday season. Media reports about avian (bird) flu (H5N1) have generated some inquiries asking about chicken and poultry consumption. Here's the most current information:

**Is it safe to eat chicken, poultry, and eggs?** YES, it is safe to eat chicken, poultry, and eggs. This includes poultry such as turkey.

**Has the U.S. banned poultry coming from countries affected by avian (bird) flu (H5N1)?** Yes, the U.S. government has banned imported poultry from countries affected by bird flu (H5N1). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has established very strict import restrictions to prevent the spread of the bird flu virus (H5N1) in the U.S. USDA has also developed an elaborate surveillance system in place to monitor bird populations in the U.S.

**Is there bird flu (H5N1) in the U.S.?** No, bird flu (H5N1) is NOT present in the U.S in animals or humans. There is much media coverage on the avian (bird) flu (H5N1) potentially becoming the next pandemic (global outbreak) flu, but currently there are no reports of bird flu (H5N1) in the U.S.

**When is food cooked safe?** Place a thermometer in the thickest part of the meat or in the center of the food to get a true reading. To kill germs, food must be cooked to the following temperatures:

- Poultry and Stuffing: 165° F
- Pork: 145° F
- Beef, Lamb and Seafood: 145° F
- Rare Beef: 130° F
- Hamburger (ground beef): 155° F

**What are safe food handling and preparation tips that I can use?**

- Wash hands before and after preparing food
- Separate - Don't cross-contaminate. Keep raw meat and poultry apart from cooked foods.
- Wash hands, utensils, and kitchen surfaces with hot soapy water after they touch raw meat or poultry.
- Cook poultry and eggs thoroughly.
- Eat cooked food promptly and refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours after cooking.

**It's important to practice safe food handling and preparation because** millions of people get sick from dangerous bacteria in food every year. Many people don't link their illness to food-borne bacteria. They think they have a case of the flu. An individual can become sick anytime from 20 minutes to 6 weeks after eating food with some types of harmful bacteria. Infants and young children, pregnant women, and older adults are at greatest risk for food borne illness.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – Food Safety Office, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food Safety and Inspection Office, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) – National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)

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