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Ohio Department of Agriculture and Ohio Department of Health



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DT: August 1, 2011

TO: Health Commissioners, Directors of Environmental Health and Interested Parties

FR: Ohio Department of Agriculture, Division of Food Safety
Ohio Department of Health, Bureau of Environmental Health

RE: FSIS Issues Public Health Alert For Frozen, Fresh Ground Turkey Products

FSIS Issues Public Health Alert For Frozen, Fresh Ground Turkey Products

WASHINGTON, July 29, 2011 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is issuing a public health alert due to concerns about illnesses caused by *Salmonella* Heidelberg that may be associated with use and consumption of ground turkey.

This public health alert was initiated after continuous medical reports, ongoing investigations and testing conducted by various departments of health across the nation determined there is an association between consumption of ground turkey products and an estimated 77 illnesses reported in 26 states. The illnesses were linked through an epidemiologic investigation and PFGE analyses by state health departments and The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

CDC is partnering with state health departments to monitor the outbreak while FSIS focuses its investigation on potential identification of a contamination source(s).

FSIS reminds consumers of the critical importance of following package cooking instructions for frozen or fresh ground turkey products and general food safety guidelines when handling and preparing any raw meat or poultry. In particular, while cooking instructions may give a specific number of minutes of cooking for each side of the patty in order to attain 165 °F internal temperature, consumers should be aware that actual time may vary depending on the cooking method (broiling, frying, or grilling) and the temperature of the product (chilled versus frozen) so it is important that the final temperature of 165 °F must be reached for safety. Please do not rely on the cooking time for each side of the patty, but use a food thermometer.

Ground turkey and ground turkey dishes should always be cooked to 165 °F internal temperature as measured with a food thermometer; leftovers also should be reheated to 165 °F. The **color of cooked poultry is not always a sure sign of its safety**. Only by using a food thermometer can one accurately determine that poultry has reached a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F throughout the product. Turkey can remain pink even after cooking to a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F. The meat of smoked turkey is always pink.

Consumption of food contaminated with *Salmonella* can cause salmonellosis, one of the most common bacterial foodborne illnesses. *Salmonella* infections can be life-threatening, especially to those with weak immune systems, such as infants, the elderly and persons with HIV infection or undergoing chemotherapy.

The most common symptoms of salmonellosis are diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and fever within eight to 72 hours. Additional symptoms may be chills, headache, nausea and vomiting that can last up to seven days.

Consumers with food safety questions can "Ask Karen," the FSIS virtual representative available 24 hours a day at AskKaren.gov. The toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) is available in English and Spanish and can be reached from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Eastern Time) Monday through Friday. Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day.

Recommendations for Preventing Salmonellosis:

Wash hands with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling raw meat and poultry. Also wash cutting boards, dishes and utensils with hot soapy water. Clean up spills right away.

Keep raw meat, fish and poultry away from other food that will not be cooked. Use separate cutting boards for raw meat, poultry and egg products and cooked foods.

Cook raw meat and poultry to safe internal temperatures before eating. The safe internal temperature for meat such as ground beef and pork is 160° F, and 165° F for poultry, as **determined with a food thermometer**.

Refrigerate raw meat and poultry within two hours after purchase (one hour if temperatures exceed 90° F). Refrigerate cooked meat and poultry within two hours after cooking.