FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HOLIDAY FOOD SAFETY TIPS
MORGANTOWN, WV – NOVEMBER 18, 2016

As the holiday season approaches, the Monongalia County Health Department (MCHD) wants to help assure a festive, and healthy, holiday atmosphere by offering simple food preparation tips.

WASH HANDS PROPERLY - Hand washing is one of the most important control measures to protect both the preparer and food. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water for 15 to 20 seconds after:

• Visiting the restroom, coughing, sneezing, eating, drinking, touching bare human body parts or using a tissue or tobacco.

• Handling soiled dishes or utensils, emptying the garbage, caring for animals or engaging in any activity that may contaminate hands.

• Before and after preparing any type of food, especially when switching between raw and ready-to-eat food.

THAW YOUR TURKEYS PROPERLY - Do not thaw a turkey, or any food item, on the counter. Room temperature thawing provides the perfect environment for bacteria to multiply rapidly. Food safety experts recommend thawing foods:

• In the refrigerator, allowing 24 hours for every 5 pounds of turkey.

• Completely submerging small portions of food under running water that is less than 71 degrees Fahrenheit.

• In the microwave oven, immediately followed by cooking for smaller quantities of food.

• As part of the cooking process for previously-cooked food or for commercially-processed items.

PREVENT CROSS-CONTAMINATION

• Keep raw meat, poultry or seafood separate from each other and away from other foods. Store on the lowest shelf to keep juices from dripping on to other foods.

• When barbecuing or cooking raw animal food, use a different plate and utensils for cooked food than the one that held the raw food.
• Clean with hot, soapy water then disinfect cutting boards, utensils and kitchen surfaces after preparing raw meat, poultry, seafood or other foods. Use separate cutting boards and utensils for raw animal food as an additional safeguard.

• Prepare a solution of 1 teaspoon commercial bleach to 1 gallon of warm water to disinfect surfaces.

**COOK FOODS THOROUGHLY**

• Meat and poultry should be cooked all the way through until the juices run clear. Cook thawed turkey at 325 degrees for 15 minutes per pound.

• Cook stuffed or unstuffed turkey to an internal temperature of 180 degrees and separately cooked homemade stuffing to 165 degrees. Do not put warm stuffing into a cold turkey. Warm stuffing could cause bacteria inside of the turkey to reproduce. Cool the stuffing first, then place into the turkey prior to cooking.

• Do not taste or eat raw, rare or even pink ground meat or poultry in any form. When eating out, order ground meats and poultry thoroughly cooked.

• Cook seafood until it is opaque and flaky. Avoid raw shellfish, such as oysters or clams, even if marinated.

• Cook eggs thoroughly to be firm and not runny, or substitute with pasteurized eggs.

• Avoid eating other foods that contain raw or undercooked eggs, such as homemade Caesar salad dressing or cookie dough.

**STORE FOOD PROPERLY**

• Refrigerate or freeze perishable foods right away after returning from the store.

• Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold after they are prepared.

• Refrigerate or freeze leftovers promptly in shallow containers. Do not leave food out at room temperature for longer than 2 hours. Remember, most bacteria double every 20 minutes at room temperature.

• Use the first in, first out method by serving the food prepared the earliest first. And remember, “When in doubt, throw it out.”

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the MCHD at 304-598-5100.