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MEAT THERMOMETERS HIGH ON SAFE FOOD STOCKING STUFFER LIST

RESEARCH SHOWS LESS THAN A QUARTER OF HOUSEHOLDS HAVE ONE!

Time to stuff those turkeys and those stockings, so it's time to think about meat thermometers and the three quarters of Australians without one!

The Food Safety Information Council recommends meat thermometers be used to decrease the risk of food poisoning, but only 23% of Australian households own a meat thermometer and only a third of those with a one have used it in the last month, according to Council commissioned Newspoll research released today.

Food Safety Information Council Chair, Dr Michael Eyles, says there are a number of great ideas on the Council's suggested Christmas gift list (see below) that will lower the risk for food poisoning but with the Council's research showing so few households with one, a meat thermometer is an excellent suggestion.

"A meat thermometer is a vital piece of kitchen equipment for both food safety and food quality reasons making it surprising that less than a quarter of households have one, and even more surprising that only about a third of those with one say they have used it in the previous month," Dr Eyles says.

"A meat thermometer ensures the safe cooking of poultry, and meats which have what used to be in the outside where bacteria live, now on the inside, such as mince products like hamburgers and sausages, and cuts of meats rolled up for roasting. It is also a vital piece of equipment if you want to get consistently good results from your cooking. It is not just about safety – remove the guesswork and be a better cook with a meat thermometer," Dr Eyles says.

"A meat thermometer makes a great Christmas present and they are available from good kitchen shops and some electrical stores ranging in price from between \$12 to \$35. It is not only a small price to pay for the safety of your family and friends but is a minor cost to ensure food is consistently cooked to perfection.

Dr Eyles advises the thermometer be placed in the thickest part of the meat not touching bone or gristle. Poultry, sausages, hamburgers and rolled roast meats should reach an internal temperature of 75°C to ensure all food poisoning bacteria are killed. Pieces of beef, pork or lamb that are not rolled, stuffed or tenderised should only have contamination on the surface so they can remain rare in the middle as long as the outside of the meat is fully cooked to kill external bacteria.

"There are an estimated 5.4 million cases of food poisoning in Australia each year, including 120 deaths. The risk of your family getting food poisoning increases around Christmas time as the weather warms up and we prepare food for larger numbers of people, some of whom may be in the high risk groups of the very young, pregnant women and the elderly. Using something as simple as a meat thermometer can reduce this risk," Dr Eyles concludes.

The national Newspoll study of more than 1200 respondents, 18 years and over found:

- Nearly 1 in 4 (23%) households claim to have a meat thermometer at home. This varies across the country, ranging from 27% in Victoria, to 17% in Queensland.
- Higher income households are significantly more likely to have a meat thermometer. 28% of households with an income of \$80,000+ claim to have a meat thermometer, compared to just 17% of households with an income of less than \$30,000.

- Among those who have a meat thermometer, only 1 in 3 (35%) claim to have used it in the last month, with half of these (18%) claiming to have used it in the last week.

The Food Safety Information Council's list of simple and fun Christmas gifts for:

Hands on cooks:

- A cook can never have too many **chopping boards** – remember they aren't heirlooms and should be thrown out once they have nicks or scratches that trap bacteria. Why not give different colour, plastic boards for the separate chopping of meat or chicken and veggies.
- New **tea towels** and separate **hand towels** are always useful so you can wash them often and don't forget a **nail brush** for keeping hands extra clean.
- There are lots of cool and colourful **containers with lids** available now to separate foods in the fridge and stop meat and chicken juices leaking on to foods which won't be cooked such as salad vegetables and fruits.
- **Fridge thermometers** are available from all good kitchen stores and will make sure the fridge is running at a food-safe 5 Celsius or below.

BBQ Guru:

- Keep friends and family safe with a **meat thermometer** which will also impress them with your cooking skills.
- Replace those ancient rusty **BBQ tools** and perhaps even the **BBQ** itself (or at least give some BBQ cleaner).

Gardener:

- Don't let the gardener bring nasties in from the garden, give them sturdy, long **garden gloves** to reduce the amount of soil on hands and separate disposable **rubber gloves** for dealing with fertilisers or chemicals.
- A **nail brush** and **gardener's soap** will help them clean up when they come back in.

DIY fiends and mechanics:

- Try giving some special **mechanics soap**, disposable **rubber gloves** and a **nail brush** so chemicals don't contaminate the food they'll eat or prepare.
- If their handywork tends to go wrong, give brightly **coloured band aids** that can be easily spotted if they fall in food.

Picnic Lover:

- Pick up a new **Esky** or insulated food container with plenty of **refreezable cold packs**.
- Buy a new **picnic set** with plates and cutlery that are easier to wash than the ancient ones.
- Give plenty of **plastic containers with lids** that will separate foods in the Esky and stop meat and chicken juices leaking on to foods which won't be cooked such as salad vegetables and fruits.
- Some **hand wipes or alcohol sanitizer** to keep hands clean when picnicking away from running water.

School children:

- Give a bright **insulated lunch container** with a freezable drink container or ice brick to keep school lunches cool and safer (good for adult workers too).

*The **Food Safety Information Council** is Australia's leading disseminator of consumer targeted food safety information. It is a non-profit entity supported by the Australian Department of Health and Ageing, state and territory health and food safety agencies, local government, and leading professional, industry and community organisations.*

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NOTE: Pronunciation of 'Eyles': as for 'British Isles', or 'supermarket aisles'.

FURTHER INFORMATION: www.foodsafety.asn.au