

'Healthy Markets' promotes safe visits to markets

Written by Patricia Weaver
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Education effort to focus on safe food handling, safe animal contact

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) are partnering with Long Cheng and Concord live animal markets in South St. Paul to launch "Healthy Markets," an educational effort to promote healthy behaviors at the markets. "Healthy Markets" will focus on safe food handling and safe animal contact.

"As we enter into the holiday season, and families come to the live animal markets to prepare for their holiday meals, consumers need to be reminded of simple things they can do to have a healthy experience," said Mary Choi, MDH Healthy Markets coordinator.

For many communities, obtaining meat and poultry directly from a live animal market is an important cultural tradition, but the handling of raw meat and close contact with live animals also pose certain health risks, state health officials said. "We want to encourage simple things customers can do at the markets to protect themselves and their family members' health," Choi said.

During this effort, people who frequent the markets will see flyers and posters at the markets and in their communities promoting safe food handling and safe animal contact. Also, radio ads

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on local community stations will carry the messages. In addition, MDH staff will also be at both markets distributing information about ways to handle food safely. Some of these methods include washing hands with soap and water before and after touching raw meat and poultry, carrying market purchases home in appropriate containers such as clean coolers and plastic bags, and keeping raw meat and poultry in the refrigerator until it is ready to be cooked.

MDH staff will also be distributing flyers to patrons about safe animal contact. The flyers will remind patrons to wash their hands after touching the animals, to avoid eating and drinking at the markets, and that those at high risk for serious complications from influenza should avoid entering the area where the animals are kept. MDH volunteers at the markets will also be surveying customers to learn more about their activities while at the market in order to find other things that could be done to reduce the passing of illness between animals and people.

-MDH