

Column Name - The Heartland Minute

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*“Clean Hands are Key to Food Safety”*

Whether it’s cooking in the home or in the middle of a parking lot during a fall tailgate party, one tried-and true food safety step can keep you safe. Washing your hands! This is your number 1 defense against foodborne illness because your hands can hold a lot of germs and dirt, including under your fingernails.

Hands pick up bacteria during daily routines, including gardening, taking out the trash, driving, playing with pets and many other activities. When preparing food, wash your hands more than once, such as after you’ve handled raw eggs or meat or anything like that because that will help to prevent cross-contamination of food products. It only takes 20 seconds with soap and warm water. A helpful tip for kiddos is to have them sing the alphabet song to get through that 20 seconds and have fun doing it. Be sure to scrub your hands. The bubbles are what is picking up the dirt and taking it away.

If you are out tailgating, or anywhere a sink and warm water is not available, bring along a separate jug of warm water and soap in your cooking supplies. If you have a squirt bottle of soap that is half empty, add water to it and you’ve got a soap-and water mixture readily available. Or, if you are using a jug with warm water, put soap in it ahead of time and that’s your designated hand washing station.

You can also bring along wash cloths in baggies, or use wet wipes. Using hand sanitizer alone is not a viable option. They don’t work really well unless your hands are clean to start with. They can be used in a pinch, but it’s best to wash your hands first and then use a hand sanitizer.

Additional tips include:

- Keep raw meat separated from everything else, particularly when taking it outside to picnics or tailgate parties. Put meat in separate bags during transportation, as well as at home. Use a separate plate to serve cooked meats.
- Use separate utensils for various foods you are cooking. If you don’t have a separate set of tongs, then wash the ones you have between uses.
- Keep hot foods hot, and cold foods cold. The temperature danger zone for foods is between 40 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit. Cold foods should be stored in an environment colder than 40 F, and hot foods should be held at 140 F or higher. For outdoor parties, this means bringing lots of ice, and perhaps multiple coolers.

Happy cooking, everyone!

Information comes from K-State University food safety specialist and coordinator of the Rapid Response Center, Karen Blakeslee.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.