

Keeping Food Safe When Grilling or Packing for Picnics

For many, July 4 may be a day off from work as we celebrate Independence Day with family and friends by setting off fireworks or grilling our favorite foods.

Handling food safely is important all year round, but especially so during holiday seasons when we are making food for lots of people. Foodborne illnesses often peak during the summer season due to warmer weather and preparing food outdoors.

To help keep your pot lucks free of unwanted bacteria, be sure to follow the four core principals of cook, clean, chill and separate.

Cook food to the recommended internal temperature. If bacteria are present on food, they can be killed off during the cooking process. Contrary to what some might believe, meat and poultry should not be washed. Be sure to marinate meat in the refrigerator and discard unused marinade. Be sure to heat the following popular picnic items to the recommended internal temperatures.

- Poultry – 165° F
- Ground Meat and Hamburgers – 160° F
- Chops or Steaks – 145° F

Chill foods that won't be a refrigerator by using several ice chests or coolers to store cold food below 40 O F. Keep foods in this environment right until it is time to serve it. Cold food should be place back in refrigerators as quickly as possible. When eating outside, it is especially important to get food cooled back down within an hour if outdoor temperatures are above 90° F.

Clean all produce, surfaces, and hands regularly. Wash produce with plain water before prepping or cooking. Rub or scrub when possible to remove any dirt from the surface. Clean kitchen or table surfaces often, especially if you are making various types of dishes. When washing hands, use soap and warm water to rub between fingers, backs of hands, and up to your wrists. If you are outside and do not have access to running water, moist disposable wipes are a good choice.

Separate foods when possible. Keep raw foods away from ready-to-eat foods. Use separate plates and utensils for raw and cooked meat or was them between uses. If using cutting boards, it is especially important to clean between the prep of fruit or veggies and raw meat.

Between fireworks, parades, and poolside fun, it is easy to get distracted with holiday plans and forget about the food.

Plan ahead to reduce mishaps since cooking and eating outdoors creates an environment for foods to become unsafe.