

“Show Me” Health

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Keep Your Picnic Safe

Summer is the time for barbecues and picnics. Picnics can take on many forms, such as the community picnic, friends and neighbors, tailgate parties, or ball games. There is also one sure thing at every picnic-lots of good food and good company. The one guest you don't want to invite is food borne bacteria. You can't see them, you can't taste them - but you sure can feel them if illness occurs hours or days later.

Each year, about one in every ten Americans has an illness caused by food. Most of these cases result in simple stomachaches or diarrhea. If you prepare and then store foods properly, they will never leave their calling card behind. It's up to you to select, store, prepare, and then serve safe foods for you and your family.

- * As always, wash hands and work areas before preparing food.
- * Plan your menu with an eye to safe food handling. Cook foods in plenty of time to thoroughly chill them in shallow containers in the refrigerator.
- * Have enough coolers with ice or frozen gel packs in which to store the perishable foods like meat, poultry, fish, eggs and salads. You want to keep the food at 41 degrees F. Pack foods right from the refrigerator into the coolers.
- * Don't put the cooler in the car trunk; carry it inside an air-conditioned car. At picnics, keep the cooler in the shade and keep the lid closed. Replenish the ice if it melts.
- * Use a separate cooler for drinks so the one containing the food won't constantly be opened and closed. Don't use the ice in your food cooler for drinks, there is a risk of cross contamination by leaking raw or packaged foods like hot dogs. Always use clean ice for drinks.
- * Find out if there's a source of safe drinking water at your destination. If not, bring water for preparation and cleaning; or pack clean, wet, disposable cloths or moist towelettes and paper towels for cleaning hands and surfaces. Cross-contamination during preparation, grilling, and serving food is a prime cause of food borne illness.
- * Pack raw meats, poultry, or seafood on the bottom of the cooler. This will reduce the risk of them dripping on other foods. Pack coolers until they are full. A full cooler will stay cold longer than one that is partially full.
- * If you plan on getting takeout foods such as fried chicken, eat them within an hour of pick up.

* Do not partially grill extra meat or poultry to use later. Once you begin, cook until completely done to assure bacteria are destroyed. Grill raw poultry until the juices run clear and there is no pink. Hamburger should not be pink in the center.

* When taking food off the grill, don't put the cooked items on the same platter which held the raw meat unless you have washed the platter in between uses. This cannot be stressed enough, and it is a very common mistake made in many households. It doesn't take that long to wash the plate and bring it back out to serve the meat.

* Two Hour Rule. Don't leave perishable food unrefrigerated for more than two hours. Put perishable foods back in the cooler or refrigerator as soon as you finish eating. Don't leave them out while you go for a swim or a hike, and don't leave them out all afternoon to nibble on. If something has been left out and you've lost track of time, either toss it as a precaution, or check it with a food thermometer. Again, cold foods should be 41 degrees or below.

* Chances are some picnic leftovers will have been sitting out for more than an hour or two. Discard these leftovers. Cold foods that were kept in a cooler that still has ice may be safe. If the ice has melted, the food should be discarded.

Be sure to enjoy your summer and take part in as many outdoor celebrations as you'd like. The important point is to have safe and healthy food at these get-togethers, not food that can cause food borne illness. Always prepare and store food properly!