

... JULY 2011 ...

QUICK TAKES

Why Food Poisoning Peaks in Warm Weather



Remember last summer's egg scare when half a billion eggs were recalled? Barely a week goes by without news of another outbreak of food-related illnesses or the recall of a contaminated food product. Foodborne illness -- also known as "food poisoning" -- is a serious public health threat. The hot, humid days of summer are known to increase the threat. Why?

First, the microbes that can contaminate food grow more rapidly in the warm summer months. Bacteria also need moisture to flourish, and summer weather is often quite humid.

Second, more people are cooking outside at picnics, barbecues and on camping trips. The safety controls that a kitchen provides -- thermostat-controlled cooking, refrigeration and access to hot water -- are usually not available.

Summer Food Safety

Let's look at easy ways to minimize the risk of foodborne illness when preparing for your next barbecue or picnic. The experts at the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline have broken down safe cooking and handling practices into four simple steps: **Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill**.

Clean

When preparing food, make sure you start with clean surfaces and clean hands. Hands should be washed with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before and after handling food. Equally important are the surfaces that come in contact with raw and cooked foods -- make sure they are clean before you start and are washed frequently. This is easy to do when the kitchen sink is just a few steps away. If you're camping or cooking outdoors, be sure to bring disposable hand wipes and surface wipes.

Separate

Raw meats and poultry should be prepped separately from vegetables and cooked foods. As you chop meats and veggies, be sure to use separate cutting boards. Juices from raw meats can contain harmful bacteria that could spread to raw veggies and already cooked foods. When transporting raw meat and poultry to your picnic site, enclose in lock-tight plastic bags and place in the bottom of the cooler, away from other foods and drinks. Remember, don't use the same platter or utensils you've used for raw meats when handling other foods on the menu.

Don't Blame the Mayo!

Many summer picnickers hesitate to eat salads such as macaroni, potato or chicken salad because they fear the mayonnaise in the dressing could give them food poisoning. Stories of people getting sick from eating mayonnaise-based salads date to the days when mayonnaise was made from scratch using raw eggs. Yet homemade mayo has all but disappeared from America's kitchens today.

Bottled commercial mayonnaise has been around for a century or longer. It's made with pasteurized -- not raw -- eggs along with oil, an acid such as vinegar or lemon juice, and seasoned salt and other flavorings. Scientists have shown that acid in the mayonnaise can actually slow or even prevent the growth of bacteria that cause food poisoning.

As long as that tempting salad on the picnic table was prepared in a clean, safe manner and has been kept chilled until serving time, you can enjoy it without hesitation.

Summer Food Safety

Cook

If you're the designated grill master at your next cookout, don't forget to bring a food thermometer. Foods cooked on a hot grill brown quickly on the outside, but still may not have reached a safe minimum internal temperature to kill any harmful bacteria.

- Whole cuts of beef, pork, lamb, veal and all fish should be cooked to 145°F. Hamburgers and other ground beef should reach 160°F.
- All poultry should reach a minimum temperature of 165°F.
- Fully cooked meats like hot dogs should be grilled to 165°F or until steaming hot.
- Meatless burgers and tofu dogs should be grilled to 165°F.



As you take the cooked food off the grill, be sure to place them on a clean platter, not on the dish that held them when they were raw. The juices left on the plate from raw meat can spread bacteria to safely cooked food.

Chill

Keeping food at a safe temperature can be a concern at outdoor picnics and cookouts. It's critical to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Hot foods can be kept hot on the grill, and cold foods can be kept chilled with ice packs or ice sources in a cooler. Too often, food is left to sit out while family and friends chat, drink and munch over the course of several hours. Bacteria grow most rapidly between 40°F and 140°F, so perishable food should never sit out for more than two hours. And whenever the mercury tops 90°F, food shouldn't sit out for more than one hour. Discard any food that has been out too long.

Questions? Concerns? Ask Karen

One of the best resources available when planning a summer cookout is the USDA's virtual representative, Ask Karen, a feature that allows you to ask food-safety-related questions 24 hours a day. Visit www.AskKaren.gov or call the USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at (888) MPHOTline: [(888) 674-6854].

Ask Karen is available as an app for your iPad, iPhone or Android mobile device, so you can take her with you to the grocery store, to a cookout or wherever you may have food-safety questions. Go to m.AskKaren.gov on your mobile device's browser, or download the app for free from the Android and iTunes app stores.

Waldorf Chicken Salad for a Crowd Makes: 2 quarts, for 12 servings

This refreshing salad makes a perfect side dish for a summer picnic.

Ingredients

1/2 cup light mayonnaise
1/4 cup nonfat plain yogurt
1/4 cup Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon rice or cider vinegar
1 teaspoon honey
1/4 cup minced fresh parsley
2 teaspoons olive oil
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
4 cups (16 oz) shredded cooked chicken or turkey breast
2 cups diced crunchy vegetables such as celery, bell pepper, broccoli stems, kohlrabi or fennel bulb
2 cups diced apple or sliced red grapes
3/4 cup chopped walnuts
4 scallions, thinly sliced
Lettuce leaves or pita bread



Preparation

In a large bowl, whisk together mayonnaise, yogurt, mustard, lemon juice, vinegar, honey, parsley, oil and black pepper. Add chicken or turkey, vegetables, fruit, walnuts and scallions. Toss well to coat with the dressing. Chill before serving. Serve on a bed of lettuce leaves or stuffed into whole-wheat pita bread halves.

Nutritional info

Per serving
189 Calories
9g Fat
2g Saturated fat
22g Protein
18g Carbohydrate
4g Fiber
322mg Sodium
69g Calcium

Source:
Healthy Living Kitchens

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