

KEEP FOOD SAFE!

During the summer months outdoor activities tend to increase due to family gatherings, reunions, cookouts and other special events. The summer months are a great time for family and friends to gather and take advantage of the warm weather and enjoy some good food and company.

One thing that we do need to be aware of while preparing and storing food for those special events is that foodborne illnesses do increase during the summer months. One very obvious reason for this is due to the much warmer temperatures that are associated with the summer. Since bacteria are always present it just takes the right conditions for these microorganisms to flourish. When bacteria multiply to large numbers due to the improper handling of foods, the folks that are consuming the food could be at risk of becoming sick.

When cooking out it is very important to follow some simple steps to help prevent a potential foodborne illness. One of the most important things to remember is to wash your hands properly and thoroughly with hot water and soap. This is very important after handling raw meats, using the bathroom, or changing a diaper. Allow at least twenty seconds to wash your hands.

Another precaution to take is avoid storing raw meats with ready to eat items or utensils and try to separate meats of different species. Always wrap raw meats tightly when transporting. This will help prevent raw juices from the meat from contaminating other foods or surfaces. Wash all utensils thoroughly after holding any type of raw meat or poultry.

Cooking temperatures are another important step in maintaining food safety. It is always wise to use a working and calibrated food thermometer. This will help you insure that the meats are being cooked to a proper temperature for sufficient enough time to kill most bacteria. Any hamburger or ground meats should be cooked to an internal temperature of at least 160 degrees Fahrenheit. Ground poultry requires a higher cooking temperature. Whole steak and roasts need to be cooked to at least 145 degrees Fahrenheit. Poultry should be cooked to minimum of 180 degrees Fahrenheit.

Any food that is left out more than two hours without refrigeration may not be safe to eat. When the outside temperature is above 90 degrees Fahrenheit food can spoil quicker so to keep the food safe try not to leave out more than one hour. If refrigeration is available foods that must be kept cold should be properly maintained in refrigeration or at least packed on ice.

Taking advantage of some basic food handling and procedures can help guarantee that your family and friends can have a safe and enjoyable cookout. Contact the environmental health division at your local health department for more tips on safe food handling. *Submitted by John McKean, SIT*