



Summer is here! Fun times such as pool parties and other social events can mean foodborne illnesses caused by disease-causing bacteria found in many foods. Most often, these bacteria spread when proper hand-washing techniques are not used; when uncooked foods are allowed to cross-contaminate foods that are ready to eat; when needed end-point temperatures are not met (hot foods are not kept hot and cold foods are not kept cold); and when proper sanitation methods are not used. Follow these tips from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to ensure that your food stays safe to eat.

Handwashing

- Washing hands is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of disease-causing bacteria. Hands should be washed with soap and water before handling food or before handling a different food. Be sure to include soap and paper towels. Hand sanitizers kill bacteria, but they do not remove dirt and dead bacteria.

Packing and Traveling

- Carry cold perishable food in an insulated cooler packed with several inches of ice, frozen gel packs or containers of ice.
- When packing the cooler, be sure raw meat and poultry are wrapped securely to prevent their juices from cross-contaminating ready-to-eat food.
- If bringing hot food, eat it within 2 hours of preparation (1 hour if the weather temperature is above 90°F).

Cooking and Serving

- Always marinate food in the refrigerator, not on the counter. If some of the marinade is to be used for basting during smoking or as a sauce on the cooked food, reserve a portion of the marinade. Transport marinated meat and any reserved marinade in a cooler and keep it cold until grilling.
- In addition to a grill and fuel for cooking food, be sure to pack a food thermometer. Meat and poultry cooked on a grill often browns very fast on the outside, but is not thoroughly cooked on the inside. With a thermometer, you can check to make sure the meat reaches a minimum of 155°F and poultry at least 165°F to destroy harmful bacteria. Clean the thermometer after each use to avoid cross-contamination.
- Do not partially cook meat or poultry ahead of time at home. Partial cooking food without cooking it to its safe temperature allows harmful bacteria to survive and multiply. Once meat or poultry starts cooking, continue cooking until it reaches a safe temperature as determined with a food thermometer.
- Include lots of clean utensils for preparing and serving the safely cooked food. Bring water for cleaning if none will be available at the site. Wash cutting boards, utensils and other surfaces with hot soapy water and rinse before preparing other foods with them.
- Use a clean platter when taking food off the grill. Don't put cooked food on the same platter that held raw meat or poultry. Any harmful bacteria present in the raw meat juices could contaminate safely cooked food. In hot weather (above 90°F), food should never sit out for more than 1 hour.
- Protect food from insects and other contaminants by using lids or covers. Make sure that garbage cans with plastic liners and lids are available.
- Discard any perishable foods that have been left out for more than 2 hours.

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Originally Printed by The Seminole Tribune