

Daily Union Article

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Title: Outdoor Food Safety (Part 2 Of 3)

Picnics and parties abound during the lazy days of summer. It's a great time of year to enjoy great friends and great food – as long as you keep things safe! Unfortunately, the heat and festivities lend themselves to the risk of food borne illnesses. Here are some of the common foodborne illnesses and their symptoms:

Botulism: Symptoms include *double vision, inability to swallow, difficulty with speaking, and progressive paralysis of the respiratory system*. Effects occur 4 – 36 hours after eating contaminated food. Caused by a toxin release from a bacteria called Clostridium botulinum. The toxins are heat resistant and can survive in foods that are incorrectly or minimally processed. Seek medical attention immediately due to the effects of this potentially fatal illness.

E-coli O157:H7: Symptoms include *severe bloody diarrhea and abdominal cramps, though sometimes the diarrhea is without blood or no symptoms show at all*. With little or no fever present the illness can resolve in 5 to 10 days. Children and the elderly are particularly at risk for experiencing a complication called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) which destroys the red blood cells and cause kidney failure. HUS occurs in 2%-7% of infections and is the leading cause of acute kidney failure in U.S. children and is most common caused by E-coli O157:H7. Effects generally occur 2-5 days after eating. Although rare this is a very dangerous type of E. coli. It is caused by eating meat, especially ground beef, which has not been cooked to the proper temperature. You cannot smell or see any indication that meat contaminated with this type of E. coli is going to make you sick. Aside from meat, E-coli O157:H7 has been found in sprouts, lettuce, salami, unpasteurized milk and juice, and from swimming in or drinking sewage-contaminated water. Playmates and family members of infected individuals are at high risk of becoming infected in the presence of poor hygiene. Good hygiene practices, proper food preparation techniques, and thorough cooking can help prevent this type of foodborne illness.

Listeriosis: Symptoms include *fever, headache, nausea, and vomiting*. It is especially dangerous for pregnant women and their fetuses, newborns, the elderly, people with cancer, and those with compromised immune systems. The effects will present themselves from 7-30 days after eating, but more commonly occurs within 48-72 hours after consumption of contaminated food. The illness is caused by the presence of listeria in soft cheese, unpasteurized milk, hot dogs and deli meats, imported seafood products, frozen cooked crab meat, cooked shrimp, and cooked surimi (imitation shellfish.). Listeria bacteria resists heat, salt, and acidity more so than many other micro-organisms. They can also survive and grow at refrigerated temperatures.

Salmonellosis: Symptoms include *diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramps and vomiting*. The effects of this illness present themselves within 8-12 hours. Illness is caused by the *salmonella* bacteria through raw meats, poultry, raw eggs, milk and other dairy products, shrimp, frog legs, yeast, coconut, pasta and chocolate.

This list of foodborne illness is an abridged version of a much longer and more thorough list offered on the Fight BAC website at <http://www.fightbac.org>. Fight BAC is an organization whose sole purpose is to educate and inform consumers for the purpose of preventing food poisoning.

Although this list is short, it represents the reason it is important to practice safe food handling and preparation techniques throughout the year and especially in the fun and sun activities of summer. Foodborne bacteria can multiply rapidly in our Kansas heat. There are some simple and quick actions you can take to reduce the risk of becoming ill or causing illness for your summer entertaining.

- 1) Wash fresh fruits and vegetables under running water before you pack them in a cooler or place them on a serving platter.
- 2) Keep your utensils and platters clean when preparing foods and avoid cross contamination by placing them close to or touching meat dishes. Be careful not to cross-contaminate raw meats with other prepared food at the table or in the cooler.
- 3) Keep your cold food cold. Make sure you keep the food you are serving for an outside event in the refrigerator until the very last minute possible. You can use ice packs in a cooler but know that you need to keep the temperature at 40°F or below to prevent bacterial growth. You can pack meat, poultry, and seafood while still frozen to keep them colder longer.
- 4) Keep meat and other perishables in separate coolers. Additionally, keep beverages in their own cooler, as well. By doing this, the frequent opening of your beverage cooler will not affect your ability to maintain the cold environment needed to keep the food safe.

When you are serving a meal outdoors, it is wise to provide access for handwashing. If you are not at a location where running water is available, pack an extra water thermos filled with warm water and provide soap and paper towels. Using moist disposable towelettes is another option, but is not as safe as traditional hand-washing.

Cold foods should not sit out more than 2 hours in mild temperature and no longer than 1 hour in hot temperatures (above 90°F.) Likewise, hot foods need to stay hot – at a temperature at or above 140°F. If you are uncertain how long food has been out of the appropriate temperature zone, don't risk it. As my dad always said when we were kids given the chore of refrigerator clean up, "When In Doubt, Throw it out!"

You want to enjoy your summer with family and friends. Keep things light, fun, and safe by using smart food handling and preparation techniques. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!