

The Daily Union Article
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Title: "How Food Safety Savvy Are You?"

Our summer schedules are often filled with family reunions, ball games, swim parties and cookouts. Safely handling the food that accompanies all of this is important for our health and well-being. If we eat food that is improperly cooked or contaminated with high levels of bacteria, we can become ill – perhaps even deathly ill!

So, how food safety savvy are you? The Kansas humid summer weather offers a fertile environment for bacteria to grow. Regular handwashing can reduce the amount of bacteria we unknowingly pass from one surface to another. If food is left out of refrigeration too long, dangerous bacteria can grow on and in our food causing it to become toxic to our bodies. Knowing these facts can help you make better choices in handling food safely while eating outdoors. Take this short and speedy

Food Safety Quiz

1. Hands should be washed with water and soap for at least:
 - 5 seconds
 - 20 seconds
2. Is it safe to put cooked food on a plate that held raw meat, poultry or seafood?
 - Yes
 - No
3. Food should not be left at room temperature for more than:
 - 2 hours
 - 10 hours
4. The only way to be sure foods are cooked long enough to kill harmful bacteria is to:
 - Use a food thermometer
 - Use a timer

Quiz source: USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

To protect yourself, your family and guests from foodborne illness at your cookouts, safe food handling when eating outside is especially important. Now that you've taken the quiz, here is some information provided by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration that will help you score yourself and help you keep food safe at outdoor events.

Pack and Transport Food Safely

Keep your food safe: from refrigerator/freezer – all the way to the picnic table.

- Keep cold foods cold. Place cold foods in a cooler with ice or frozen gel packs. Cold food should be stored at 40°F or below to prevent bacterial growth. Meat, poultry, and seafood may be packed while still frozen so that they stay colder longer.
- Organize your cooler contents. Separate your beverages into a separate cooler from your perishable foods. By doing so, guests open and reopen the beverage cooler to replenish their drinks. The cooler with perishables remains closed which helps keep them cold for a longer period of time.
- Keep coolers closed: Once at the picnic site, limit the number of times the cooler is opened as much as you can.
- Don't cross-contaminate. Be sure to keep raw meat, poultry, and seafood securely wrapped. This keeps the juices from contaminating prepared/cooked foods or foods that will be eaten raw, such as fruits and vegetables.
- Clean your produce. Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water before packing them in the cooler – including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten. Rub firm-skinned fruits and vegetables under running tap water or scrub with a clean vegetable brush while rinsing with running tap water. Dry fruits and vegetables with a clean cloth towel or paper towel.

Picnic Site Preparation

Food safety begins with proper hand cleaning – including outdoor settings. Before you begin setting out your picnic feast, make sure hands and surfaces are clean.

- Outdoor Hand Cleaning. If you don't have access to running water, use a water jug, some soap, and paper towels. Get your hand wet, add soap, lather for at least 20 seconds then rinse under the running water from the spout of the water jug.
- Utensils and Serving Dishes: Take care to keep all utensils and platters clean when preparing food. Place the grilling utensils in a large resealable plastic bag between uses, or securing in a covered aluminum roasting pan.

Safe Grilling

Grilling and eating outdoors often go hand in hand. Here are some important guidelines to follow to ensure that your grilled food reaches the table safely.

- Marinate safely. Marinate foods in the refrigerator before packing the food into the cooler. Never marinate on the kitchen counter or outdoors. Don't reuse marinade.
- Cook food thoroughly. When it's time to cook the food, have your food thermometer handy. Always use it to be sure your food is cooked thoroughly. You can find the Safe Food Cooking Chart at www.foodsafety.gov.

Avoid Cross Contamination

Never reuse a plate or utensils that previously held raw meat, poultry, or seafood for serving – unless they've been washed first in hot, soapy water. Otherwise you can spread bacteria from the raw juices to your cooked or ready-to-eat food. This is particularly important to remember when serving cooked foods from the grill.

Keep Cold Food Cold and Hot Foods Hot

Keeping food at proper temperatures – indoor and out – is critical in preventing the growth of foodborne bacteria. The key is to never let your picnic food remain in the “danger Zone” – between 40°F and 140°F - for more than 2 hours, or 1 hour if the outdoor temperatures are above 90°F. This is when bacteria in food can multiply rapidly, and lead to foodborne illness.

Cold perishable food should be kept in the cooler at 40°F or below until serving time. Once it is served, it should sit out for no longer than 2 hours, or 1 hour if the outdoor temperature is above 90°F. If it remains out longer than these guidelines, you need to discard it.

You want your family and friends to have a great time at your cookout. By following safe food handling practices, you will ensure they go home with a full stomach and in good health.

For more information about safe food handling practices, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research & Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!