

The weather is ripe for outdoor grilling, but don't forget to keep food safety in mind for this traditional summer activity! The warmer weather is ripe for foodborne illness because disease-causing bacteria grow faster on raw meat and poultry products in warmer weather! In addition to heat, bacteria also needs moisture to grow and spread. Kansas summer weather, often hot and humid, provides the perfect conditions for bacteria growth.

USDA's four key recommendations can help keep friends and family safe from foodborne illness during grilling season:

**Clean** - Wash hands and surfaces often. Be sure there are plenty of clean utensils and platters. If you are grilling and eating away from home, find out if there is a source of clean water. If not, bring water for preparation and cleaning or pack clean cloths and moist towelettes for cleaning surfaces and hands.

Keeping your grill clean is also important. Caked-on grease or food can cause a fire. Brush and scrub the grate well. Some spray-on grill cleaners can be effective at removing residue.

Take the grate out and clean leftover grease and food particles from inside the grill. Use a fresh clean bristle brush. Older or overused brushes can lose the little metal bristles as you brush down the grill and grate. If you don't see them, they could get stuck on your food and you could swallow them.

**Separate** - Don't cross-contaminate. Keep raw meat and poultry apart from cooked foods. To prevent foodborne illness, do not use the same platter, cutting board or utensils for raw and cooked foods. Harmful bacteria present in raw meat and poultry and their juices can contaminate cooked food.

**Cook** - Use a food thermometer to be sure meat and poultry are safely cooked. Cook food to a safe minimum internal temperature to destroy harmful bacteria. Meat and poultry cooked on a grill tends to brown quickly on the outside, so use a food thermometer to ensure the food has reached a safe minimum internal temperature. NEVER partially grill meat or poultry and finish cooking later.

- MEATS: Cook all raw beef, pork, lamb and veal steaks, chops, and roasts to a minimum internal temperature of 145°F (63°C) as measured with a food thermometer. For safety and quality, allow meat to rest for at least 3 minutes before carving or consuming.
- GROUND MEATS: All raw ground beef, pork, lamb, and veal should be cooked to an internal temperature of 160°F (71°C) as measured with a food thermometer.
- POULTRY: Poultry should be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165°F (74°C) as measured with a food thermometer.

**Chill** - Refrigerate or freeze promptly. Keep meat and poultry refrigerated until ready to use. Only take out what will immediately be placed on the grill.

When using a cooler, keep it out of the direct sunlight by placing it in the shade or shelter. Avoid opening the lid too often, which lets cold air out and warm air in. Pack beverages in one cooler and perishables in a separate cooler.

Smoked meats is a yummy outdoor cooking favorite. Smoking is cooking food indirectly in the presence of a fire so it is a longer process. If you are smoking meat or poultry, be aware that internal temperature is more important than the amount of time you cook the food.

Smoking meat and poultry can be done in a covered grill with a pan of water placed beneath the meat or poultry. Meats can also be smoked in a smoker — an outdoor cooker especially designed for smoking foods.

Because smoking is done much more slowly than grilling, the meat is tender and takes on a natural smoke flavoring. The temperature in the smoker should be maintained at 250 to 300°F (121 to 149°C) for safety. Use a food thermometer to be sure the food has reached a safe internal temperature, as well.

Pit roasting is another form of cooking meat and poultry outdoors. Pit roasting is cooking meat in a large, level hole dug in the ground. To do this, a fire, requiring wood equal to about two and a half times the volume of the pit, is built in the pit. The hardwood burns until it is reduced to burning coals.

Cooking may require 10 to 12 hours or more and is difficult to estimate. A food thermometer must be used to determine the meat or poultry's safety and doneness. There are many variables that affect cooking time such as outdoor temperature, the size and thickness of the item being cooked, and how fast the coals are heated.

Source: USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

Be sure to take care of leftovers promptly by placing them in shallow food containers and setting them in a refrigerator. If the food is left out for more than 2 hours, discard it. If the outdoor temperature is above 90°F, you need to refrigerate within 1 hour.

Reheating fully cooked meats such as bratwurst, hotdogs, or hamburgers requires a hot grill (165°F) and should be grilled until food is steaming hot.

Summer grilling offers a great way to keep the heat out of your air-conditioned house. Grilling is also a great cooking method alternative to frying – allowing you to keep meat and poultry away from the extra fat required for other cooking methods. Keep your family and guests safe and healthy at your next cookout by following safe food handling practices.

For more information of food preparation and healthy eating, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research & Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!