



**For immediate release**  
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### Keeping Food Summer-Safe

As the Fourth of July holiday kicks summer into high gear, grills and coolers are also revving up. And so is the risk food-borne illness, with an estimated 76 million cases and 5,000 deaths occurring a year.

“It’s no surprise to see an increase in food-borne illnesses in summer,” notes Casey Wardlaw-Czaplinski, RD, LD/N, nutritionist at the Durham County Health Department. “Foods are transported in hot weather to outdoor sites, many without running water or refrigeration available. It’s especially harder to keep cold foods cold. Food may be left on the table for longer than is safe. These are perfect conditions for bacteria to multiply to a level that will cause illness.”

“On the other hand,” she continues, “there are many things you can do to keep foods safe for summer festivities. Basic protection happens when you **clean, separate, cook, and chill.**”

**Clean.** Dirty hands get germs in foods. When cooking, wash hands often: before preparing food, between handling raw and ready-to-eat items, after handling pets or children, and always after using the bathroom. Wash with hot soapy water and dry with paper towels. (Damp towels can harbor many germs that can cause illness).

**Separate - don’t cross-contaminate.** Surfaces also can spread germs. Be sure countertops, cutting boards, dishes and pots and pans are clean. Keep raw foods separate from ready-to-eat foods. Use different cutting boards or wash, rinse and sanitize after contact with raw meat, poultry and seafood. Never use the utensils and dishware that have touched raw foods, such as meat, fish and poultry, to store fresh or cooked foods unless they have been washed between use. To sanitize, add about 1 teaspoon of bleach to 1 quart of water. Wash and rinse the surface and then immerse, spray or swab with the bleach solution. Let it air dry.

Take special care with produce. Be sure to wash it thoroughly with cool water before use, even if you won’t be eating the skin. For cantaloupe and watermelon, thoroughly clean the outer surface before slicing and keep work surface and utensils clean. Refrigerate sliced melon promptly at 40°F or lower. You should also refrigerate sliced tomatoes.

**Cook food to the proper internal temperature.** Just because a meat looks brown does not mean it's safe to eat. Always check the internal temperature of cooked foods with a food thermometer. Cook to these temperatures:

Ground Beef	160 degrees Fahrenheit
Poultry and Stuffed Meats	165°F
Pork Products	160°F

If you marinate meats, do it in the refrigerator, not on the counter. If you will use some of the marinade as a sauce on the cooked food, take out a portion of the marinade before adding the raw meat or poultry. Do not use uncooked marinade that has held raw meat.

**Chill, refrigerate or freeze leftovers promptly.** Don't let perishable food sit out at room temperature longer than 2 hours. If it's been out longer, it's safest to throw it away.

“So you've followed the steps to produce safe food; now how do you keep it safe when you're attending an event where food is transported? Even if you're just having a picnic in the back yard, risk increases with extra handling and higher temperatures,” notes Ms. Wardlaw-Czaplinski. Here are some additional tips to protect food safety.

**Keep cold food cold.** Hold foods at 40°F or colder to prevent bacterial growth. To do so, pack cold foods in a sturdy, insulated cooler with plenty of ice or frozen gel packs. Put cold foods in water-proof containers or wrap in plastic wrap or aluminum foil. Place frozen gel packs or ice between and on top of the packages of food. Never just set containers of food on top of ice.

The trunk of your car can reach temperatures of 150°F, so it is best to transport coolers in the passenger area of the car. When you arrive at the picnic site, put a blanket over the cooler and place it in the shade to help keep it cool. Leave the cooler closed until ready to use the contents.

**Keep hot food hot.** Keep hot foods at 140°F or hotter to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria. Take-out foods or foods cooked just before being transported to the picnic can be carried hot. Wrap hot food in towels, then newspaper, and place inside a box, heavy paper bag, or insulated container. At the picnic, keep these foods warm on a lit grill or use within one hour.

**Serve foods safely.** Do not let foods sit out for more than one hour. Any leftovers should be put back in the cooler right after they are served. The longer foods are held at unsafe temperatures (between 40°F and 140°F) the more likely that bacteria can grow and cause food-borne illness. Keep foods covered to prevent contamination by insects. Many insects can carry harmful bacteria on their bodies.

**Handle leftovers safely.** Because it is likely that picnic leftovers have been sitting out for more than one hour and have had many people handling them, throw them out. Cold foods kept in a cooler that still has ice may be safe. If the ice is melted, though, throw out the food, as cold water cannot keep foods cold enough to be safe.

Check these websites [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov), [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov), [www.ces.ncsu.edu](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu) for more information on food safety and preventing food-borne illness.

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