

Don't Invite Foodborne Illness to Your Cookout

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As the weather warms up, families are moving outdoors to enjoy cookouts and picnics. Don't let mysterious guests like bacteria and viruses spoil your outdoor dining experience. Following a few guidelines as you plan, prepare, serve, and store food can dramatically reduce your risk of getting a foodborne illness.

1. Clean and sanitize frequently to prevent the spread of bacteria in the kitchen. Wash hands with soap and hot water. Use paper towels to clean kitchen surfaces. Use separate cutting boards for fresh produce and raw meats. Wash and sanitize cutting boards, dishes, and kitchen surfaces. Prepare a sanitizer solution by mixing 1 teaspoon of bleach with 1 quart of water.
2. At the Grocery: Separate raw meats from other foods in the grocery cart and in the refrigerator. Purchase cold foods last and bring a cooler to transport them. Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared foods, and leftovers within 2 hours of shopping or preparing. Refrigerator temperatures must be 40°F or colder, freezer temperature 0°F or below. Do not purchase dented, bulging, or rusted canned products.
3. Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator - never at room temperature! Defrosting in a microwave is acceptable when thawing is a part of the cooking process.
4. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of food. Check the internal temperatures in several places to be sure bacteria are destroyed by the cooking process. Post a recommended internal cooking temperature chart in your kitchen.
5. Never partially cook food for finishing later and don't use recipes in which eggs remain raw or partially cooked. Substitute pasteurized eggs for raw eggs when possible.
6. Keep food out of the temperature danger zone (TDZ) which is 40°F-140°F. Bacteria can grow to unsafe levels in a very short period of time in this zone. Keep cold foods below 40°F and hot foods above 140°F. Never leave food in the TDZ for more than 2 hours; 1 hour in temperatures above 90 °F.
7. Chill cooked foods properly if you are planning to store. Divide food into smaller portions or containers. Cover and label foods with the name of the product and preparation date. Do not overfill the refrigerator. The air must be able to circulate around the food in the refrigerator in order to keep it cold.
8. Heat cooked, commercially packaged ready to eat foods to 140°F. Foods that have been cooked ahead and cooled should be reheated to at least 165°F. Do not reheat foods in slow cookers, steam tables, or chafing dishes.
9. Use clean containers and utensils to serve food and do not mix old food with new. Check the internal temperatures often and discard foods that have been in the danger zone for 2 or more

hours. Immediately chill leftovers and store properly.

10. And the most important rule of all: when in doubt, throw it out!

For more information about family and consumer sciences topics, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.