



Keep summer heat from spoiling picnic

Last year, I got sick after a family picnic. How can we prevent food-borne illness this year?

Food safety is more important in summer because microorganisms love heat. When you're cooking and eating meals outdoors and the weather warms up, take some special precautions.

First, remember the No. 1 food safety rule: "Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold." Usually, that means to be sure perishable food isn't kept at room temperature (or within in the "danger zone" of 40 to 140 degrees) for any longer than two hours. But if you're outdoors and temperatures reach 90 degrees or more, two hours is too long. In that heat, microorganisms can grow much more quickly, spelling trouble. On a hot summer day, food safety experts say to never let food sit out for more than one hour.

Second, remember to keep it clean. Wash your hands before handling food, and pack sanitizing wipes for your picnic or keep them in your car. If you're grilling, don't use the same plate and utensils for the cooked meat as you used for the raw. Take care that raw juices from beef, pork, poultry or other meats do not contaminate your perfectly grilled main dish.

Other tips:

- Be sure to cook meats to safe internal temperatures. Use a food thermometer to make sure poultry or fully cooked meats like hot dogs are heated through to 165 degrees; burgers and all cuts of pork to 160 degrees;

and steaks or other cuts of beef, veal or lamb are cooked to 145 degrees for rare or 160 degrees for medium.

- Treat coolers with care. Use plenty of ice and store coolers out of direct sunlight. Don't open them too frequently: Try storing beverages in a second cooler to avoid exposing mom's potato salad to warmer air every time you get thirsty. Also, consider making special ice to inhibit bacteria by adding two to four drops of bleach to a gallon of water before freezing it to keep your cooler cold.

- Keep food safety in mind when shopping, too. Don't leave food in a hot trunk as you finish running errands after grocery shopping. In fact, if you shop far from home and it's an especially hot day, consider putting canned and boxed foods in your cart first, then produce, and lastly, frozen items, meats and dairy. If you have a long trip home, it wouldn't be a bad idea to store perishables in a cooler with ice or to keep them in the air-conditioned passenger area rather than the trunk.

For more tips, see the U.S. Department of Agriculture's food safety fact sheets at http://www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets/. Click on "Seasonal Food Safety" and scroll down for food safety information related to barbecues, camping and boating, and other seasonal- or holiday-related topics.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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