Food Safety 101 – Simple Tips To Prevent Foodborne Illness

It's no secret that food safety protocols typically fall by the wayside during the summer. Grilling, cookouts, and recent outdoor dining mandates mean that food is being prepared and consumed outside. Unfortunately, this is also the reason why summer is the peak season for foodborne illness.

It's easy to become more relaxed and distracted while you put together a feast for your family and loved ones or customers. As a result, you may become less concerned about basic food safety guidelines.   Examples include not keeping track of how long food is being left sitting out or if surfaces are being   disinfected.

Aside from this, there's another reason why E. Coli, listeria, salmonella, and other foodborne diseases love the summer – they are able to multiply at lightning speed in hot temperatures. When you combine 80-100 degree weather and a lapse in food safety protocol, it's the perfect combination for infection and sickness.

To keep you and your loved ones or customers safe, continue reading to learn about simple food safety tips.

COMMON FOOD SAFETY MISTAKES

It seems natural to place a plate of raw chicken on an outside table while you get the grill fired up and running. But as innocent as it seems, this is a food safety violation. Most food safety mistakes are honest blunders that occur due to a lack of knowledge or proper training. However, even the smallest food misstep can get someone very very sick.

Top food safety offenses include:

- Leaving raw meat out of the refrigerator for extended amounts of time. This allows harmful bacteria to breed in your poultry, beef, or seafood.
- Leaving cooked food uncovered or unrefrigerated beyond safe times. Doing this exposes food to bugs and creates an environment for illness-causing pathogens to thrive.
- Not properly sanitizing and disinfecting food prep surfaces and tools. This accidentally spreads unsafe juices and particles between counters, knives, cutting boards, plates, tongs, and other surfaces or tools you use for food preparation.
- Using the same food prep tools and surfaces for all foods. This mistake creates an environment where bacteria and viruses aren't contained to specific areas and are more likely to spread.
- Sitting food out in the sun. This increases the speed at which pathogens multiply and decreases the window for safe consumption.

POOR FOOD SAFETY CAN SICKEN DOZENS AT A TIME

Since it's pretty standard for several people to share dishes and meals with others, the true impact of a food outbreak can be wide-spread. Let's say a bad batch of deviled eggs gets pass around to guests at a cookout.

It won't be long before each person who consumed the egg falls ill – which could be 5 people or more. This is also how large food production and manufacturing facilities are able to sicken thousands of people at a time with one spoiled item.

CAN'T MISS FOOD SAFETY TIPS

If you're weary of cooking or eating outdoors now, don't be! You can still enjoy these warm weather months and everything summer has to offer. All you need to do is remember and follow the CDC's simple guidelines on 4 steps for food safety. In addition to that, reference these tips to ensure your celebrations stay safe and healthy for everyone involved.

1. COOK FOOD THOROUGHLY

Meat and veggies are delicious – but dangerous if not prepared correctly. Unless you're a chef, you may not know when your food is cooked all the way through. Don't be too cool to use a food thermometer to ensure food is cooked to the right temperature, either. The CDC's recommended cooking temperatures are:

- 145°F for whole cuts of beef, pork, lamb, veal, and fish.
- 160°F for hamburgers and other ground beef, all poultry, and meats like hot dogs or sausages.

For added protection, store food at 140°F or warmer until you serve it. This ensures bacteria don't multiply and cause sickness.

2. STORE FOOD AT A SAFE TEMPERATURE

Sorry to burst your bubble, but once you cook your food to the correct temperature, your work isn't done. Food safety doesn't stop once you're done preparing your meal. After you've carefully prepped, cooked, and served up some delicious food, you need to be sure to store food within the correct temperature range.

Don't leave food out for extended periods of time. Of course, during summer events, you'll want to set up a buffet or a spread. But all your hard work will go to waste if it sits out unrefrigerated for too long. Timing will vary based on the outdoor temperature and if the food is in the sun.

However, a good rule of thumb is to freeze or refrigerate food within two hours of cooking it, or one hour if the temperature is above 90 degrees. Be sure to store food in a refrigerator that is at least 40 degrees or cooler.

3. DON'T LEAVE FOOD OUT, ESPECIALLY OUTDOORS

Leaving food uncovered exposes it to debris, viruses, insects, and of course, pathogens. Leaving food uncovered increases the likelihood of a dish becoming contaminated.

Standard practice is to leave food out for no more than two hours, regardless if you're indoors or outdoors. Although leaving food out may be more convenient, putting it in the fridge is the best step you can take to prevent food poisoning.

4. HAVE COLOR-CODED PREP MATERIALS FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF PRODUCE AND MEATS

Using a color-coded prep system for produce and meats helps to prevent cross-contamination and all of the dangers that come with it. You can implement this by designating colored cutting boards, bowls, and utensils for different foods.

An example would be to use a red cutting board and for chicken only, green cutting boards for vegetables, and blue cutting boards for fruit. This is a quick and easy way to avoid moving bacteria between surfaces and foods.

5. SMELL + EXAMINE FOOD BEFORE EATING

We've all done it before. You open a container or a gallon of milk and take a whiff to see if it's still good to eat. It should go without saying that if something smells funny, you shouldn't eat it. A telltale sign of food being bad is a sour, rancid odor.

Food can start to smell if it is expired or has been left out too long. Believe it or not, this is nature's way of trying to stop you from making a bad decision. Another consideration after smell is appearance. Green or yellow patches and white fuzz is also a sign of spoiled food. Just like with smell, if something looks funny, don't eat it.

6. DON'T EAT FOOD PAST THE EXPIRATION DATE

Nothing is more frustrating than reaching into your refrigerator, with a plan to make the most wonderful summer side dish ever, and realizing that the key ingredient that you thought you had on hand has actually expired.

If an item is past the expiration date, throw it out. Consuming food past the expiration or "best by" date can have consequences in the form of nausea, diarrhea, and stomach pains. Toss the expired item with no regrets.

7. SANITIZE AND DISINFECT SURFACE AND MATERIALS AFTER EACH USE

While meal prepping for the week or getting dinner ready for the evening, it's easier to move through to the entire process using the same utensils and surfaces and rinsing or wiping them every now and then.

However, not sanitizing and disinfecting them will result in cross-contamination and allow germs to spread – leading to sickness. Using quick and easy disinfecting wipes are probably the quickest, easiest way to follow food safety protocols.

But beware that all wipes aren't created equal. It's important to note that some wipes contain bleach, alcohol, and ammonia that can damage your tools and surfaces like wood and stainless steel, which are commonly found in kitchens and food facilities.

Wipes are a great way to ensure you're following food-safety protocols, but be sure you're choosing the right wipe for your needs.

SAFE FOOD IS GOOD FOOD

Most people won't realize that they either didn't follow proper food safety protocols or were the victim of someone else not following food safety protocols until they get sick. And by that time, it's too late to go back in time and do something differently.

This is why following food safety steps, no matter what time of year, cannot be overlooked or forgotten. Safe food starts with safe food practices. Implement these tips to keep your food not only delectable and tasty but most importantly, safe for consumption.
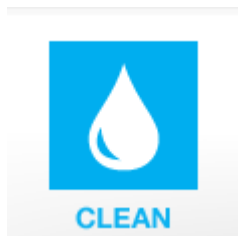
HOW TO GRILL SAFELY: FOUR STEPS TO FOOD SAFETY: CLEAN, SEPARATE, COOK, CHILL!!

Español (Spanish)

Food poisoning peaks in the summer months when warmer temperatures cause foodborne germs to flourish. Follow these steps for a safe and enjoyable grilling season

Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill—can help protect you and your loved ones from food poisoning.

Clean: Wash your hands and surfaces often. external icon

- Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water before, during, and after preparing food, handling raw meat, poultry and seafood and before, during and after eating.

- Germs that cause food poisoning can survive in many places and spread around your kitchen and campsite.

- Wash your work surfaces , utensils, cutting boards, and the grill with hot, soapy water, before and after cooking.

- Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running water.

- Check your grill and tools. Use a moist cloth or paper towel to clean the grill surface before cooking. If you use a wire bristle brush, thoroughly inspect the grills surface before cooking. Wire bristles from grill cleaning brushes may dislodge and stick into food on the grill.

Separate: Don't cross-contaminate. external icon

- Raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs can spread germs to ready-to-eat foods—unless you keep them separate.

    - Use separate cutting boards and plates for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.

    - When grocery shopping, pick up meat, poultry and seafood last, right before checkout. To PREVENT cross contamination keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and their juices in separate individual bags away from all other foods.

    - Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs separate from all other foods in the fridge or cooler.

    - Throw out marinades and sauces that have touched raw meat juices which can spread germs to cooked foods. ○ Use clean utensils and a clean plate to remove cooked meat from the grill.

Cook: To the right temperature.external icon

- Food is safely cooked when the internal temperature gets high enough to kill germs that can make you sick. The only way to tell if food is safely cooked is to use a food thermometer. You can't tell if food is safely cooked by checking its color and texture.
- Use a food thermometer to ensure foods are cooked to a safe internal temperature. Check this chart for a detailed list of foods and temperatures external icon.
    - ○ 145°F for whole cuts of beef, pork, veal, and lamb (then allow the meat to rest for 3 minutes before carving or eating)

    - ○ 160°F for ground meats, such as beef and pork

    - ○ 165°F for all poultry, including ground chicken, turkey and pre-cooked meats, like hotdogs, brats, kielbasa

    - ○ 165°F for leftovers and casseroles

    - ○ 145°F for fresh ham (raw)

    - ○ 145°F for fin fish or cook until flesh is opaque

    - ○ 140°F or warmer After grilling – until food is served.
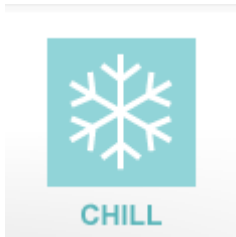
Chill: Refrigerate promptly. external icon

Bacteria can multiply rapidly if left at room temperature or in the "Danger Zone" between 40°F and 140°F. Never leave perishable food out for more than 2 hours (or 1 hour if it's hotter than 90°F outside).

- Keep your refrigerator at 40°F or below and know when to throw food out external icon.

- Refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours. (If outdoor temperature is above 90°F, refrigerate within 1 hour.)

- Thaw frozen food safely in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave. Never thaw foods on the counter, because bacteria multiply quickly in the parts of the food that reach room temperature.

- Keep meat, poultry, and seafood refrigerated or in cooler until ready to grill. When transporting, keep below 40°F in an insulated cooler.

- Divide leftovers into small portions and place in covered, shallow containers. Put in freezer or fridge within two hours of cooking (one hour if above 90°F outside).

Get Ready to Grill Safely

Separate

When shopping, pick up meat, poultry, and seafood last and separate them from other food in your shopping cart and grocery bags.

Chill

Keep meat, poultry, and seafood refrigerated until ready to grill. When transporting, keep below **40°F** in an insulated cooler.

40°F

Clean

Wash your hands with soap before and after handling raw meat, poultry, and seafood. Wash work surfaces, utensils, and the grill before and after cooking.

SOAP

Cook

Use a food thermometer to ensure meat is cooked hot enough to kill harmful germs. When smoking, keep temperature inside the smoker at **225°F** to **300°F** to keep meat at a safe temperature while it cooks.

145°F	beef, pork, lamb, veal (then let rest 3 minutes before serving)
145°F	fish
160°F	hamburgers and other ground meat
165°F	poultry

Don't cross-contaminate

Throw out marinades and sauces that have touched raw meat juices. Put cooked meat on a clean plate.

Refrigerate

Divide leftovers into small portions and place in covered, shallow containers. Put in freezer or fridge within two hours of cooking (one hour if above **90°F** outside).

CDC

www.cdc.gov/foodsafety

Accessible version: https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/communication/bbq-iq.html

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