

Smart Food Safety Practices Can Avoid Summertime Foodborne Illness

As summer truly gets underway, more and more families and neighbors will be taking advantage of the weather to cook and eat outdoors. But feeding a large group of family and friends when the weather is hot can make food safety a challenge.

Department of Health and Senior Services Commissioner Fred M. Jacobs, M.D., J.D, reminds New Jersey residents to keep a few guidelines in mind to help prevent food borne illness.

Food borne illness is a significant public health concern in the United States. In fact, around 76 million cases of food sickness, resulting in 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths occur each year. Especially at risk are young children, the elderly and people with diseases that involve the immune system, such as asthma, arthritis, cancer, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, and liver or kidney diseases.

“Foodborne illness cases rise during the summer because bacteria thrive in warm temperatures,” said Commissioner Jacobs. “For example, what many people call ‘stomach flu’ or ‘intestinal virus’ is often caused by food poisoning, which may become a serious condition requiring medical treatment and hospitalization.”

The Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) has some simple food safety tips to help minimize food borne illness and develop good food safety practices when preparing foods which include:

- Clean - Wash your hands often and make sure there are plenty of clean utensils and platters on hand; wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly
- Cook Thoroughly – Cook food to a safe internal temperature; use a food thermometer
- Separate – Separate raw and cooked food to prevent cross-contamination
- At home - Make sure the temperature in your refrigerator is 41° F or below and 0° F or below in the freezer.

An important lesson is to remember the basics. Wash your hands well and often with soap and water, especially before food preparation or eating. Cook foods at the right internal temperature, make sure meats are thoroughly cooked. Undercooked beef can cause very serious illnesses, especially for those most vulnerable - pregnant women, children, the elderly, and those with serious health conditions.

While many people are careful with foods such as potato, macaroni or egg salads, they tend to overlook fresh fruit and vegetables. Foodborne disease outbreaks from fresh vegetables consumed raw are becoming an increasing concern to health officials.

Food Safety Guidelines to Avoid Summertime Foodborne Illness

Priority Area	Guidelines
<p>To transport food safely:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep cold food cold. When you leave the supermarket, place cold food in a cooler with ice or frozen gel packs. Cold food should be held at or below 41° F. • Pack meat, poultry, and seafood while it is frozen so that it stays colder longer. • Keep raw meat, poultry, and seafood securely wrapped by using separate containers or heavy duty zip lock bags. This will prevent the juices from contaminating cooked foods or foods eaten raw, such as fruits and vegetables. • Remember to rinse raw fruits and vegetables in running water before packing them. Dry fruits and vegetables with a clean cloth towel or paper towel. • Keep the cooler in the air-conditioned passenger compartment of your car, rather than in a hot trunk. Limit the times the cooler is opened. Keep the cooler in a shaded location. Putting a towel over the cooler also helps to keep the cooler contents chilled.
<p>To grill food safely:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marinate foods in your refrigerator, not on the counter or outdoors. If you plan to use some of the marinade as a sauce, set aside a portion before adding the raw meat, poultry, or seafood. Never reuse marinade. • Do not use the same platter and utensils that previously held <i>raw</i> meat or seafood to serve <i>cooked</i> meats and seafood. • If you partially cook food in the microwave, oven, or stove to reduce grilling time, do so immediately before the food goes on the hot grill. • Cook food thoroughly. The only way to know if it is cooked properly is to use your food thermometer. If you do not have a one, you can buy one at the grocery store. The correct temperatures for cooked foods are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Beef, veal, and lamb steaks and roasts – 145° F for medium rare, 160° F for medium, and 170° F for well done. ○ Ground beef (hamburgers) and ground pork – 155° F. ○ Ground poultry – 165° F ○ Whole poultry (take temperature in the thigh) – 180° F. ○ Fin fish – 145° F, or until the flesh is opaque and separates easily with a fork. ○ Shrimp, lobster, and crabs – the meat should be pearly and opaque. ○ Clams, oysters, and mussels – cook until the shells open.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grilled food can be kept hot until served by moving it to the side of the grill rack, just away from the coals where it can overcook.
To serve food safely:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot.• Do not use a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry, or seafood for anything else unless the plate has first been washed in hot, soapy water.• Hot food should be kept hot, at or above 135° F. Wrap well and place in an insulated container.• Foods like chicken salad and desserts in individual serving dishes can also be placed directly on ice, or in a shallow container set in a deep pan filled with ice. Drain off water as ice melts and replace ice frequently.• Do not let perishable food sit out longer than two hours.• Food should not sit out for more than one hour in temperatures above 90° F. The hotter the day, the quicker food can become hazardous. So start chilling the leftovers or store hot food over 135° F by the use of sternos or moving it to the side of the grill rack. The grill must remain on at low temperature.