

Don't let Food Poison Summer Fun

What would Summer be without picnics, cookouts, and potlucks? Food and Summer fun seem to go hand-in-hand, but a case of *food poisoning* can make lasting memories for all the wrong reasons. A little planning for food safety can keep the fun in your Summer outings.

Actually, *food poisoning* is a misnomer. It's not poison in the food that makes us ill, but rather bacteria and viruses that travel along for the ride. Sometimes, as in botulism and staphylococcal food-borne illnesses, it is the toxin produced by these microbes that cause the trouble.

Salmonella and Campylobacter species and certain strains of *E. coli* are among the most common causes of food-borne bacterial illnesses. Food-borne illnesses typically produce varying degrees of nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and diarrhea. In some, particularly the very young and old or those with weakened immune systems, the illness can be severe and even fatal.

A church potluck dinner in Lancaster, Ohio in 2015 led to the nation's largest botulism outbreak in 40 years, killing 1 and hospitalizing 21 others. Potato salad prepared with home-canned potatoes was implicated as the source of the botulism.

Simple food handling tips can reduce the risk of family members or friends contracting a food-borne illness at your summer cookout. Start by thawing meats in the refrigerator overnight. Handwashing is the most effective way to reduce food-borne illness. Always wash your hands with soap and water after handling uncooked eggs or raw meat.

Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot. Bacteria grow most rapidly in the range of temperatures between 40 °F and 135 °F, doubling in number in as little as 20 minutes. This range of temperatures is often called the Danger Zone. Keep cold foods below 40 °F in an insulated cooler filled with ice or frozen

gel packs. Serve cold food in small portions and keep the rest in the cooler. When grilling out, keep hot food hot by setting it to the side of the grill rack.

Remember the 2-hour rule. Perishable food should never sit out for more than two hours after preparation. In hot weather, above 90 °F, food should never sit out for more than one hour.

Use a food thermometer to make certain meat and poultry are cooked thoroughly to their safe internal temperatures: 145°F for beef, pork, lamb and veal; 155 °F for ground meats; 165 °F for whole poultry, poultry breasts, and ground poultry.

Leftovers should be chilled as soon as possible and reheated to at least 165 °F.

Contact the Adams County Health Department at 937-544-5547 for additional food safety information.

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