

health alert

Summer Food Safety: What Everyone Should Know

(NAPS)—As the temperature climbs, so does the incidence of foodborne illness. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Fight Back™ campaign, there are four simple steps people can take to keep themselves safe and enjoy the warmer weather.

1. Clean. Wash your hands with soap and water before handling food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers and handling pets. Also, when eating away from home, find out if there is a source of clean water. If not, bring water for preparation and cleaning, or pack disposable towels and paper towels.

2. Separate. Cross-contamination during preparation, grilling and serving food is a major cause of foodborne illness. When packing the cooler for an outing, wrap raw meats securely; avoid raw meat juices from coming in contact with ready-to-eat food. Wash plates, utensils and cutting boards that held the raw meat or poultry before using again for cooked food.

3. Cook. Food safety experts agree that food is safely cooked when it is heated to a safe internal temperature. It is the only way to tell if harmful bacteria are destroyed.

- Take your food thermometer along and use it! The USDA's messenger, Thermy™, says "It's Safe to Bite when the Temperature Is Right!". Meat and poultry cooked on a grill often browns very fast on the outside, so be sure that meats are cooked to a safe temperature.

- Cook meats as follows: hamburger and other ground meats (veal, lamb, pork) to an internal temperature, 160°F; ground poultry, 165°F; steaks and roasts, 145°F for medium-rare, 160°F for medium, 170°F for well-done; whole poultry, 180°F in the thigh; breast meat, 170°F, and fresh cuts



Safe storage and cooking of perishable foods can help prevent foodborne illness.

of pork, 160°F.

- Cook meat completely at the picnic site. Partial cooking ahead of time allows bacteria to survive and multiply to the point that subsequent cooking cannot destroy.

4. Chill. Keep cold food cold—at or below 40°F. Holding food at an unsafe temperature, in the Danger Zone (40°F to 140°F), can lead to foodborne illness.

- Perishable food, such as luncheon meats, cooked meats, chicken and potato or pasta salads should be kept in an insulated cooler packed with plenty of ice, ice packs or containers of frozen water.

- Pack canned beverages in one cooler and perishable food in another because the beverage cooler will probably be opened frequently.

- Keep the cooler in the coolest part of the car and place out of the sun when possible. When in doubt throw it out!

For food safety information about meat, poultry or egg products, call the toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555. A selection of food safety recordings can be heard 24 hours a day. Information is also available online at www.fsis.usda.gov.