

Guest Editorial for daily and community newspapers and other publications.

By Food Safety Partner (personalize)

Be Food Safe. These three simple words are at the heart of a new public awareness campaign being conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and endorsed by the Partnership for Food Safety Education, and hundreds of State and local food safety partners throughout the United States, including here in our own backyard thanks to the work of **[Enter your organization's name]**.

Foodborne illness is a serious public health threat and all of us are susceptible.

Consider the numbers: Each year, approximately 76 million cases of foodborne illness occur in the United States alone, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Of those cases of foodborne illness, more than 325,000 people are hospitalized and about 5,000 people die – that is almost 13 people every day.

According to the **[enter name of State, city or County Health Department]**, there were approximately **[enter number of foodborne illness cases]** of foodborne illness in **[enter year that figures were last reported]** in the **[state, city or county]**.

Most experts agree that a cooperative approach from all those who have a vested interest in the food supply is the only sure way to combat this significant public health problem.

“We are all dependent upon food and this means every single American can play his or her part to ensure that it is safe,” said U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Richard A. Raymond. “From farm to table, we all have a role in keeping our food safe.”

Farmers and ranchers must be committed to raising only the very best – and safest – food products. Food companies and food processors must continue to be vigilant about ensuring that food is processed in accordance with the stringent Federal standards that are in place to ensure safety. The USDA and Federal, State, and local government agencies must enforce the food safety laws that are on the books to ensure the food we eat is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged.

But the last line of defense in combating foodborne illness takes place in the kitchen. The *Be Food Safe* campaign empowers consumers with the knowledge to achieve and maintain safe food handling behaviors. It is critical that those preparing meals know how to safely cook and prepare food.

“Food safety is one of those issues where most people don't think about doing something about it until they are suffering the consequences,” said **[attribute this quote or a variation of it to a local health official.]** “A lot of us don't wash our hands, we use one

cutting board to prepare our meals, and we assume the food we eat has been cooked to safe temperatures and has been handled safely – so clearly there is room for improvement.”

“While everyone is at risk for foodborne illness, there are those that face a higher risk if they consume unsafe food, said Tim Hammonds, Chairman of the Partnership for Food Safety Education. “One in five persons are more at risk than most for contracting a foodborne illness that may result in hospitalization or even death.”

At-risk persons include the very young, older adults, pregnant women, and those with weakened immune systems. These food safety steps are especially important for them, and the messages of the *Be Food Safe* campaign can literally be a life saver.

The four basic safe food handling behaviors are clean, separate, cook, and chill:

Clean – Wash hands, utensils, and cutting boards before and after contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs.

Separate – Keep raw meat and poultry apart from foods that won’t be cooked. Use different cutting boards for meat, poultry, seafood, and veggies.

Cook – You can’t tell it’s done by how it looks! Use a food thermometer to be sure meat and poultry have reached a safe minimum internal temperature.

- Poultry should be cooked to 165 °F.
- Ground beef should be cooked to 160 °F.
- Egg dishes should be cooked to 160 °F.
- Steaks and roasts should be cooked to 145 °F.
- Fish should be cooked to 145 °F.

Chill – Chill leftovers and takeout foods within 2 hours and keep the fridge at 40 °F or below to keep bacteria from growing.

So the next time you are cooking up something in the kitchen – whether you are preparing for a large dinner party, feeding your family, or fixing yourself a snack – remember to keep these four simple messages in mind so you will *Be Food Safe*.