

## Summer Food Safety

As the weather turns warmer and the school year comes to a close, your family is probably making their summer plans: trips to the beach, weekend picnics, and backyard barbecues, not to mention all of the swimming, biking and hiking that warm weather brings. Since many of these activities often include food, it's important to follow food safety guidelines and proper cooking procedures to ensure that your summer is free from foodborne illness.

When proper food handling procedures are not followed, it can result in the multiplication of harmful bacteria. If a person eats a food that contains these bacteria, they may become ill. This is known as a foodborne illness. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that 76 million cases of foodborne disease occur each year. While these illnesses often cause only mild symptoms, sometimes the outcomes are much more severe. Although food safety is important year-round, there are some potentially hazardous foods that are specific to summer-time eating that include: meats and poultry, melons, salad ingredients such as canned chicken and tuna, hard boiled eggs and cooked pasta.

Here are some specific tips to follow when preparing these foods:

**Grilling Meats:** When grilling meats, be sure to use a meat thermometer to ensure that you are cooking to a safe internal temperature to destroy harmful bacteria. Beef, veal, and lamb steaks, roasts and chops should be cooked to a minimum temperature of 145 °F. Hamburgers made of ground beef and all cuts of pork should reach 160 °F and all poultry should reach a minimum temperature of 165 °F.

**Fruits and Vegetables:** Be sure to wash all fresh fruits and vegetables with running water before serving. In the summer, melons are a popular fruit and a potentially hazardous food. Be sure to clean the outside of melons with a stiff brush and running water before slicing. If bacteria are present on the outside, it can be transferred to the inside of the fruit simply by cutting through it.

**Summer Salads:** Although it is true that mayonnaise-based salads are risky in the summer heat, it is not the mayonnaise but often the other ingredients that can become hazardous. Potatoes, eggs, pasta, and tuna are often mixed with mayonnaise before being thoroughly chilled and then left at room temperature. Since bacteria thrive in warm ingredients, make to sure to pre-chill all ingredients, even canned tuna and chicken, before combining them. Transport salads in a cooler with ice and place salad bowls in a larger bowl full of ice when serving.

**Transporting:** If you're bringing food to another location, be sure to keep it cold- at 45 °F or below- to minimize bacterial growth. Use an insulated cooler filled with ice or ice packs. Pack the cooler just before leaving home and keep it out of direct sunlight when you reach your destination.

### Other Safety Tips:

- After eating, be sure to store leftovers immediately on ice or in a cooler.
- To prevent cross-contamination, use separate utensils, cutting boards, and platters for raw and cooked foods.
- All meats should be thoroughly defrosted in a refrigerator prior to grilling. Only use the microwave for defrosting if the meat will be cooked immediately.
- Marinate meats in the refrigerator, not the counter top.
- Keep cold foods cold – below 45 °F.
- Keep hot foods hot – above 140 °F.
- Wash hands frequently, especially before and after handling raw meats, to minimize the risk of foodborne illness.

Have a safe and healthy summer!

For more information on food safety contact your local Health Department or visit [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov).