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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Keeping Your Cookout Safe

Everyone likes to have a barbeque, but no one wants to get food poisoning. Extension Agent, Jean Justice says there are easy ways you avoid contracting food poisoning by following some simple steps when handling, preparing and storing your food items.

Around twenty-four percent of food poisoning cases are the result of unclean hands. So, start with clean hands. Any time you are preparing or handling food, start by washing with soap and water before cooking. This is especially important when handling raw meat, fish or poultry. Also, wash those surfaces on which your raw foods will be placed on. If these surfaces aren't clean, cross contamination will occur as you transfer bacteria from one surface to another.

You may be asking, "what if there is no running water available?"

While soap and water are the first choice, it is okay to use a wet wipe on your hands, followed by an alcohol-based gel sanitizer. Cutting up raw fresh fruits and vegetables? Make sure you wash them under running water before cutting. Bacteria on the outside can be transferred to the inside flesh with a knife when cutting.

You can use a vegetable brush or your hands to rub or scrub fruits that have a tough skin, such as melons or vegetables with a thick skin. Commercial fruit washes are available but are expensive and water alone will get the job done.

Any of you afraid to make potato salad or macaroni salads made with mayonnaise for your cookout because someone might get sick? Rest assured that is an old wives tale that may have had some truth to it in our grandmothers' day when they made their own mayonnaise, but not today with the commercial products on the market. Today's mayonnaise is made with vinegar and/or lemon juice and has high levels of salt and acidity which helps prevent bacterial growth. Also, commercial mayonnaise uses "pasteurized eggs" which means they have been heat-treated to destroy any bacteria that may have been present. However, one word of warning, you still need to keep any mayonnaise based foods chilled to 41 degrees Fahrenheit. This is especially true if protein foods such as eggs or meat are in the dish.



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If you make your own mayonnaise, ice cream or Caesar salad dressing using regular raw eggs instead of pasteurized eggs, you DO NEED to be very careful about temperatures, especially on a HOT day. Pasteurized eggs are available at many grocery stores but be sure to read the label as the commonly sold eggs are NOT pasteurized.

Remember it is important to keep hot foods hot (over 140 degrees) and cold foods cold (41 degrees or colder). Bacteria grows in the DANGER ZONE between 41 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit. Keeping food cold (41 degrees or colder) can prevent bacterial growth and heating food (hotter than 140 degrees will kill harmful bacteria).

Cold foods should not be left at room temperature more than two hours. On hot summer days when the temperatures are 90 or above, food should not be left out more than one hour. One suggestion for keeping cold foods cold is to put food in shallow containers which are then placed on ice. Remember to replace ice as it melts. After two hours foods should be refrigerated or tossed to avoid the chance of food poisoning.

One final reminder, cook your meats to the appropriate temperatures. Color is NOT an indication of doneness. Just because that burger turned brown instead of pink doesn't mean it has reached an internal temperature of 160 or above which is the temperature needed to kill E.coli. For chicken it is necessary to reach an internal temperature of 165 degrees or above .

Follow these simple, easy steps and your summer barbeques will be fun and health.

For more information on food safety, nutrition and diet, contact your local Extension Office.