

Jackson County Department of Public Health

Melissa McKnight
Health Education Supervisor/PIO
828-587-8288

2015-50
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 17, 2015

OBSERVE SAFE FOOD HABITS WHEN OUTDOORS THIS SUMMER

Warm weather picnics and cookouts can produce opportunities for food-borne illness if safe food-handling practices are not closely observed, state health officials caution.

"We encourage families to get outside and enjoy our state, but remember to take the necessary steps for food preparation and storage to enjoy healthy meals safely," said Jaime Dellinger, Environmental Health Supervisor.

Nationally, an estimated one in six Americans, or 48 million people, get sick from unsafe food each year, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Of those, 128,000 are hospitalized and 3,000 die from food-borne diseases.

U.S. outbreaks of staphylococcus, salmonella and botulism over the past few years have called attention to the importance of safe food handling practices. Dellinger recommends taking the following steps to reduce the risk of food contamination and food-borne illness:

- **Clean** - Wash hands, utensils and surfaces before and after food preparation, especially after preparing meat, poultry, eggs or seafood. Keep all countertops and work areas clean.
- **Cook to Proper Temperature** - Read cooking directions on packaging before preparing. Cook food to the proper internal temperature and check the final temperature with a food thermometer.
- **Chill** - Refrigerate properly. Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared food and leftovers within two hours. Make sure the refrigerator is set no higher than 40 degrees Fahrenheit and the freezer at zero degrees Fahrenheit.
- **Separate** - Don't cross-contaminate foods. Keep raw meats, poultry, eggs, and seafood and their juices - and any utensils that may have been in contact with these items - away from ready to eat food.
- **Leftovers** - Heat to 165 degrees Fahrenheit. If they appear cloudy, mushy or have an unusual odor, dispose of them.
- **Time** - Once foods are properly prepared, be sure to keep *hot foods hot* (maintain them at a temperature greater than 140 degrees Fahrenheit) and *cold foods cold* (maintain them at a temperature of less than 40 degrees Fahrenheit). Foods should not remain in the "Temperature Danger Zone" of 40 F-140 F for more than two hours, and no more than one hour if the temperature is greater than 90 F.

For more information about food-borne illness: <http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/cd/diseases/food.html> .

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