

Barbecue Basics: Tips to Prevent Foodborne Illness

It's the season for picnics, cookouts, and other outdoor parties. But eating outdoors in warm weather presents a food safety challenge. Bacteria in food multiply faster at temperatures between 40°F and 140°F, so summer heat makes the basics of food safety especially important.



“Fortunately, there are a lot of steps consumers can take to keep family and friends from becoming ill,” says Marjorie Davidson, Ph.D., education team leader in FDA’s Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

Wash hands.

It seems basic, but not everyone does it. Wash hands well and often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the bathroom and before cooking or eating. If you’re in an outdoor setting with no bathroom, use a water jug, some soap, and paper towels. Consider carrying moist disposable towelettes for cleaning your hands.

Keep raw food separate from cooked food.

Don’t use a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry, or seafood for anything else unless the plate has first been washed in hot, soapy water. Keep utensils and surfaces clean.

Marinate food in the refrigerator, not out on the counter.

And if you want to use some of the marinade as a sauce on the cooked

food, reserve a separate portion. Don’t reuse marinade that contained raw meat.

Cook food thoroughly.

To kill any harmful bacteria that may be present, use a food thermometer. Hamburgers should be cooked to 160°F. If a thermometer is not available, make sure hamburgers are brown all the way through, not pink. Chicken should be cooked to at least 165°F. If you partially cook food in the microwave, oven or stove, to reduce grilling time, do so immediately before the food goes on the hot grill.

Refrigerate and freeze food promptly.

It can be hard to remember while a party is going on, but food should not be left out of the cooler or off the grill for more than two hours. Never leave food out for more than one hour when the temperature is above 90°F.

Keep hot food hot.

Hot food should be kept at or above 140°F. Hot food should be wrapped

well and placed in an insulated container. If bringing hot take-out food such as fried chicken or barbecue to an outdoor party, eat it within two hours of purchase. In addition to bringing a grill and fuel for cooking to an outdoor location, remember to pack a food thermometer to check that your meat and poultry reach a safe internal temperature. When re-heating food at the outing, be sure it reaches 165°F.

Keep cold food cold.

Cold food should be held at or below 40°F. Foods like chicken salad and desserts that are in individual serving dishes can be placed directly on ice or in a shallow container set in a deep pan filled with ice. Drain off water as ice melts and replace ice frequently.

For more tips for safe outdoor eating, including proper cooking temperatures for various types of meat, visit <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/ffsumme2.html>