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Avoid Unwanted Guests at Your Next Family Gathering!

Summer is officially here, the Fourth of July is just a few weeks away and most families celebrate with good food, friends, and even a few fireworks. Picnics are the perfect way to enjoy good weather, good company, and good food not only during July 4th, but throughout the summer. One run-in with food poisoning, though, can ruin your summer fun.

Most people love a picnic and the food that goes with it. Grilled chicken, hamburgers, deviled eggs, and potato salad are all picnic favorites, but with picnic food comes an increase in food-borne illness. Remember to clean, separate, cook, and chill your foods while at your summertime get-together.

During summertime get-togethers, people may become less careful with food. People are enjoying each other's company at their family reunion or picnic, and they forget how much time has passed while the food has been sitting out. People go back and snack on foods hours after it has been served. Foods that need to be kept hot or cold may be at temperatures ripe enough for bacteria growth and can cause a food-borne illness. Additionally, bacteria can double in numbers about every fifteen minutes depending on how high the heat is.

Another reason food-borne illness seems to increase this time of year is due to hand-washing. Whether this be that hand-washing facilities are not as plentiful, or that people do not wash their hands as often as needed while enjoying the great outdoors. It is recommended that you carry moist towels or instant hand sanitizer to avoid spreading dirt and germs from your hands to your food if hand-washing facilities are not available.

Remember these four steps to keeping food safe during your summertime get-togethers: clean, separate, cook, and chill.

Clean: Keep your foods clean, wash fresh fruits and vegetables and store them away from uncooked meats and other uncooked foods. Keep utensils used to grill food separate from serving utensils.

Separate: Do not use the same platter or utensils for uncooked and cooked foods. Pack hamburgers in plastic bags that can be tossed after placing them on the grill to avoid cross-contamination with ready-to-eat foods. Prepare as much food at home and ahead of time as

possible. Avoid storing or transporting uncooked foods and ready-to-eat foods in the same cooler if possible.

Cook: Cook foods to their respective internal temperature to destroy any harmful bacteria. Use a meat thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the meat. Cook all raw beef, pork, lamb, veal, chops, and roasts to a minimum temperature of 145°. For all raw ground meats cook to 155°. All poultry should be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165°.

Chill: Cold foods like deviled eggs need to be kept cold at 41° or colder. The best way to check is with a food thermometer. Food should not be sitting out for more than 2 hours, or even 1 hour with temperatures over 90°. Keep items cold with ice or a cooler. Maintain hot foods warmth with some type of food warmer or on a warm grill to the side of the hot coals to prevent overcooking. Check the temperature with a thermometer to assure it is within the safe ranges. Hot foods hot at 135° or above and cold foods cold at 41° or below.

If there isn't a way to check the temperature, food shouldn't be left off ice or out of refrigeration for longer than two hours. Bacteria grows at temperatures between 41° and 135° degrees F and can grow even faster at temperatures of 70° to 125°.

This summer enjoy your family and friends without unwanted guests. Clean, separate, cook and chill while enjoying good food, friends and possibly a few fireworks at your gatherings.

If you have questions about this or any other topic related to nutrition, food safety or health please contact Holly Miner at haminer@ksu.edu or call 620-331-2690.

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