

Summer Food Safety

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More than half of Americans say they are cooking outdoors year round. So whether the snow is blowing or the sun is shining, it's important to follow food safety guidelines. By using these simple guidelines for grilling food safely you can limit harmful bacteria from multiplying and causing foodborne illness.

From the Store: Home First

When shopping, buy cold food like your meats right before checkout. Separate raw meat from other food in your shopping cart. To guard against cross-contamination — which can happen when raw meat juices drip on other food — put packages of raw meat into plastic bags. Plan to drive directly home from the grocery store, and try to refrigerate perishable food within an hour.

At home, place meat in the bottom compartments of the refrigerator immediately. Freeze meats within 4 to 5 days.

Thaw Safely

Completely thaw meat before grilling so it cooks more evenly. Use the refrigerator for safe thawing, or thaw sealed packages in cold running water. You can microwave defrost if the food will be placed immediately on the grill.

Marinating

A marinade is a savory, acidic sauce in which a food is soaked to enrich its flavor or to tenderize it. Marinate food in the refrigerator for no longer than 7 days, and never on the counter. If some of the marinade is to be used as a sauce on the cooked food, reserve a portion of the marinade before putting the raw meat into it. However, if the marinade used on the raw meat is to be reused, make sure to heat it to 165°F first to destroy any harmful bacteria.

Transporting

When carrying food to another location, keep it cold to minimize bacterial growth. Use an insulated cooler with sufficient ice or ice packs to keep the food at 41 °F or below. Keep it out of the direct sun by placing it in the shade or shelter. Avoid opening the lid too often, which lets cold air out and warm air in. Pack beverages in one cooler and perishables in a separate cooler.

Keep Everything Clean

Be sure there are plenty of clean utensils and platters. To prevent foodborne illness, don't use the same platter and utensils for raw and cooked meat. Harmful bacteria present in raw meat and its juices can contaminate safely cooked food. If you're eating away from home, find out if there's a source of clean water. If not, bring water for preparation and cleaning. Pack clean cloths for cleaning surfaces and hands. Wash hands often.

Precooking

Precooking food partially in the microwave, oven, or stove is a good way of reducing grilling time. Just make sure that the food goes immediately on the preheated grill to complete cooking.

SAFE MINIMUM INTERNAL TEMPERATURES (for at least 15 seconds)

- Poultry (ground or whole), stuffed meats and stuffed fish: **165 °F**
- Ground or injected meats: **155 °F**
- Beef, veal, lamb, pork, fish and game meat (steaks, roasts and chops): **145 °F**

Cook Thoroughly

Cook food to a safe minimum internal temperature to destroy harmful bacteria. Meat cooked on a grill often browns very fast on the outside. Use a food thermometer to be sure the food has reached a safe minimum internal temperature for at least 15 seconds. Beef, veal, lamb, pork fish and game meat (steaks, roasts and chops) can be cooked to 145 °F. Hamburgers made of ground beef should reach 155 °F. All poultry should reach a minimum of 165 °F.

NEVER partially grill meat and finish cooking later.

Reheating

When reheating fully cooked meats, grill to 165 °F.

Keep Hot Food Hot

After cooking meat on the grill, keep it hot until served at 135 °F or warmer to avoid the growth of harmful bacteria. Keep cooked meats hot by setting them to the side of the grill rack, not directly over the coals where they could overcook. The cooked meat can be kept hot in an oven set at approximately 200 °F, in a chafing dish or slow cooker, or on a warming tray.

Serving the Food

When taking food off the grill, use a clean platter. Don't put cooked food on the same platter that held raw meat. Any harmful bacteria present in the raw meat juices could contaminate safely cooked food.

Food should never sit out for more than 4 hours.

Leftovers

Refrigerate any leftovers promptly in shallow containers. Discard any food left out more than 4 hours.

Safe Smoking

Smoking is cooking food indirectly in the presence of a fire. It can be done in a covered grill if a pan of water is placed beneath the meat on the grill; and meats can be smoked in a "smoker," which is an outdoor cooker especially designed for smoking foods. Smoking is done much more slowly than grilling, so less tender meats benefit from this method, and a natural smoke flavoring permeates the meat. The temperature in the smoker should be maintained at 250 to 300 °F for safety. Use a food thermometer to be sure the food has reached a safe internal temperature.

Pit Roasting

Pit roasting is cooking meat in a large, level hole dug in the earth. A hardwood fire is built in the pit, requiring wood equal to about 2½ times the volume of the pit. The hardwood is allowed to burn until the wood reduces and the pit is half filled with burning coals. This can require 4 to 6 hours burning time.

Cooking may require 10 to 12 hours or more and is difficult to estimate. A food thermometer must be used to determine the meat's safety and doneness. There are many variables such as outdoor temperature, the size and thickness of the meat, and how fast the coals are cooking.

For additional information visit the Southeastern District Health Department's website at www.sdhdidaho.org.