Harrisonville, MO

Remember food safety while enjoying summer activities.

The 4th of July is upon us and as we enjoy our time with family and friends I want to give everyone a few food safety tips.

Most people love a picnic and the food that goes with it. Grilled chicken, hamburgers, baked beans and potato salad are all picnic favorites, but with picnic foods come a chance for an increase in food-borne illness.

The Center for Disease Control estimates that each year roughly 1 in 6 Americans or 48 million people get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die of foodborne diseases.

Keep Hot Foods Hot and Cold Foods Cold, even outdoors. Transport chilled foods, since it’s hard to keep foods hot without a heat source. Refrigerate or freeze the food overnight. For a cold source, bring frozen gel packs or frozen box drinks. Block ice works better than ice cubes.

Fill the cooler with cold or frozen foods. Pack foods in reverse order. First foods packed should be the last foods used – with one exception: pack raw meat or poultry below ready-to-eat foods to prevent raw meat or poultry juices from dripping onto the other foods or keep them in a separate cooler.
Take foods in the smallest quantity needed. Place your food cooler in the air-conditioned passenger section of the vehicle, not the trunk. At the picnic site insulate the cooler with a blanket and place in the shade. If ice melts and gel-packs are no longer frozen discard all perishable food to avoid food borne illness.

Salmonella and staphylococcus are two common illnesses people contract from undercooked or improperly cooked food. Foods affected by these two bacteria include meat products and salads, especially tuna, and potato salad.

Cross contamination of raw chicken could cause a salmonella outbreak. Be sure to use a clean knife and cutting board after preparing raw meats such as chicken for your BBQ.

Staphylococcus Aureus, also known as staph, is caused by unsafe food handling practices such as not washing hands properly. Picnics are usually outdoors and may be in an area where hand washing facilities are not as plentiful, or people don't wash their hands as often as needed when enjoying the great outdoors. It is recommended that you carry moist towelettes or instant hand sanitizer to avoid spreading dirt and germs from hands to your food. The most common foods for staphylococcus are those that are prepared and served cold with no cooking involved to kill the harmful bacteria.

Mayonnaise or salad dressing products are foods that are often overlooked for food safety. Potato salad and deviled eggs should not be left out of refrigeration as the mayonnaise or salad dressing is the main threat for illness. Foods such as these should be served cold, and placed back into an ice filled cooler or refrigerator immediately to lessen bacterial growth. Cold foods need to be kept cold at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or colder. Bacteria grow best at temperatures between 41 and 135 degrees F. The best way to check food temperature is with a food thermometer.

If there is no a way to check the temperature, do not leave food out longer than two hours before returning it to the refrigerator or putting in a cooler with ice. A few food safety steps used now will make your picnic experiences a great memory of time spent with family and friends and not a memory of time spent being ill.
Enjoy this 4\textsuperscript{th} of July and remember if you have questions about food safety or any other nutrition related topic please visit \url{www.extension.missouri.edu}, or stop in or contact me at the Missouri Extension Service Center in Cass County - 816-380-8460. I would be glad to help you have a food safety, worry free 4\textsuperscript{th} of July. And thank you to all who have served their country to enable us to celebrate our freedoms.

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