

Picnic Precautions

Summer is here! It is time to break out the barbecue and hit the outdoors for fun in the sun. But before you pack up your picnic basket for a fun-filled afternoon at the park, fire up the backyard barbecue, or prepare a pool side lunch for friends, there are a few very important precautions you should take to prevent foodborne illness from ruining your outdoor eating activities.

***Wash your hands often! When preparing a variety of foods at the same time, it is important not to pass bacteria from one food to another with your hands.**

Washing your hands with warm soapy water for at least 15 seconds before preparing foods and after handling raw meats will significantly lower the risk of foodborne illness.

***Keep raw meats and ready-to-eat foods separate. Cross contamination occurs when juices from raw meats accidentally touch cooked or ready-to-eat foods. Make sure to use two separate cutting boards, one for raw meat, and the other for fruits and vegetables.**

***" Make mine well" Whether you like your steak rare or not, it is very important to cook your large cuts of meat throughout. It is ok to have pink in the center, but make sure the outside is cooked to a dark brown. When barbecuing poultry or seafood, always make sure the meat is cooked through out. Use a food thermometer to check the proper cooked temperature of the foods you are preparing.**

***Never wear the same plate twice. Plates that have had raw meats on them should always be washed immediately. Never use the same plate once the meat has been cooked.**

***Keep hot food hot, and cold food cold. Particularly when you're enjoying an afternoon picnic in the sun, it is critical that cold foods such as potato salad, stay chilled throughout the day. Hot foods, like steak, chicken or hot dogs should be kept covered in foil to retain heat. At the end of the day, make sure to promptly refrigerate all the food you intend to save for the next day. This will help reduce the growth of bacteria in the food.**

***Keep melons out of the "danger zone". Melons can pose a risk for foodborne illness if not prepared or stored properly. Before cutting into a melon, wash the out surface with water thoroughly to remove surface dirt—even if the melon looks clean! Once a melon has been cut, you must keep it chilled in ice or refrigerated at 45 degrees or less. Cut melons can be served without refrigeration for a maximum of 4 hours.**

***Safety on the side. Never keep side food items out for longer than two hours that are prepared with mayonnaise or are considered high in protein. Bacteria can multiply in moist foods including salads and desserts. Keep your cold side dishes chilled and away from the sun at all times!!**