

Grilling It Safely!

Alice Henneman
Extension Educator, NU
Lancaster County Extension
&
Joyce Jensen
Environmental Health
Specialist, Lincoln-Lancaster
County Health Department

With the return of warm weather, it's time for gathering around the grill and enjoying good times with friends and family. Don't let a food-borne illness spoil your fun. Follow these checkpoints for safe grilling from Alice Henneman, NU Lancaster County Extension and Joyce Jensen, Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department the next time you fire up the grill.

1. When shopping, choose meat and poultry last, and don't put them in the trunk. The temperature there is too hot and bacteria will grow rapidly. Don't let meat set out for longer than one hour during warm weather. If meat sets out too long, bacteria can produce toxins that can cause illness and stay active even during cooking.

2. Refrigerate meat and poultry immediately upon arriving home.

3. Purchase ground meat or poultry no more than a day or two before you plan to grill it. Otherwise, freeze them. Grill larger cuts of meat, such as steaks, within 4 days of purchase or freeze them.

4. Completely thaw meat and poultry in the refrigerator or just prior to cooking in a microwave. Frozen foods do not grill evenly and may be unsafe. Never defrost on the counter—bacteria will begin to grow. It takes about 24 hours to thaw 5

pounds of meat in the refrigerator.

5. Clean up juice spills immediately so a raw product does not get on a cooked product. Juice spills should be cleaned with a paper towel. If using a dishcloth to wipe up raw meat or poultry juices, wash it in hot soapy water before using it again.

6. Marinate meat and poultry in the refrigerator. Sauce can be brushed on these foods while cooking, but never use the same sauce after cooking that has touched the raw product.

7. Make ground beef patties about 1/2 inch thick by 4 inches in diameter (4 oz. or 4 patties per pound). This helps assure they cook thoroughly and evenly. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) advises patties this size will take 11 to 13 minutes to cook to a safe temperature of 160 degrees F based on beef that has been removed directly from the refrigerator; cooked over medium, ash-covered coals and grilled uncovered (www.beef.org). NCBA advises you consult your owner's manual for grilling guides for gas grills as brands vary greatly.

8. Unwashed hands are a prime cause of food-borne illness. Whenever possible, wash your hands with hot, soapy water for 20 seconds before handling food. When eating away from home, pack disposable wipes for cleaning hands if no handwashing

facilities are available.



9. Transport meat and poultry to a picnic site in a cooler kept cold with ice or frozen gel packs. Pack food and cooler immediately before leaving home. Avoid frequently opening the cooler. Pack beverages in one cooler and perishables in another. Keep cooler in an air-conditioned vehicle for transporting and then keep in the shade or shelter at the picnic site. Remove at one time only the amount of food that will fit on the grill. Be sure to keep raw meat and poultry wrapped separately from cooked foods, or foods meant to be eaten raw such as fruits and vegetables.

10. Cooking is the key to meat and poultry safety. If needed, scrape the grill before grilling. Heat the grill to kill microorganisms before placing meat or poultry on it.

11. Cook ground beef patties until brown in the middle and juices are clearish with no pink in them when you cut into the meat (160 degrees F). A hamburger can be brown in the middle and still be undercooked. Help assure doneness by following the guidelines in number 7. The most accurate way to determine doneness is with an instant-read thermometer.

12. Adding sauces or spices to meat may make it look brown before it is done. Brush or sprinkle sauces/spices on the surface of cooked burgers.

13. Cook meat and poultry completely at the picnic site. Partial cooking of foods ahead of time allows bacteria to survive and multiply to the point that subsequent cooking may not destroy them.

14. Use a separate clean tongs or spatula for removing meat or poultry from the grill and place on a clean plate to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked meat.

15. Discard any food left out for more than two hours or one hour if the temperature is above 90 degrees F. When in doubt, throw it out!

16. While the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends ground meats should be heated to 160 degrees F to kill

microorganisms, the temperature for a steak can be 145 degrees F for "medium rare." A "medium" steak is cooked to 160 degrees F and a "well done" steak is cooked to 170 degrees F. Use a tongs or spatula to turn steaks rather than a fork which punctures the meat and introduces bacteria into the interior of the meat.

17. Whole poultry should be cooked to 180 degrees F in the thigh. Breast meat should be cooked to 170 degrees F. When poultry is done cooking, juices will run clear with no pink when you cut into the meat.

18. If you're preparing steaks, ground meat and/or poultry at the same time, use a different knife, utensil, or thermometer to check for doneness. For example, don't use the same thermometer to test steaks that you used for hamburgers. Remember to wash thermometers in hot soapy water and hot rinse water before and after use.

Handling Food Safely on the Road

V-A-C-A-T-I-O-N! Oh, how we long for that eight letter word every summer, when millions of us eagerly get away from school and work. We take to the road in cars or recreational vehicles; live on boats; relax in beach or mountain vacation homes; and camp.

No matter where we go or what we do, there is a common denominator that runs through all of our summer travels and relaxation—it's called F-O-O-D!

The "road" to food safety, however, can either be a

bumpy one or smooth—depending on what precautions are taken handling meals as we travel this summer.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA/FSIS) reminds everyone that some simple, common-sense food safety rules can save a vacation from disaster. Following this advice could make the difference between a vacation to remember and one that is remembered because people got sick from improperly handled food.

First, some general rules, while traveling this summer:

Plan Ahead...

If you are traveling longer than 30 minutes with perishable food, place it in a cooler with ice or freezer packs. When carrying drinks, consider packing them in a separate cooler so the food cooler is not opened frequently. Have plenty of ice or frozen gel-packs on hand before starting to pack food. If you take perishable foods along (for example, meat, poultry, eggs, and salads) for eating on the road or to cook at your vacation spot, plan to keep everything on ice in your cooler. Are there refrigerators at the

beach house or other vacation home?

Pack Safely...

Pack perishable foods directly from the refrigerator or freezer into the cooler. Meat and poultry may be packed while it is still frozen; that way it stays colder longer. Also, a full cooler will maintain its cold temperatures longer than one that is partially filled. Be sure to keep raw meat and poultry wrapped separately from cooked foods, or foods meant to be eaten raw such as fruits.

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Lancaster County 4-H Council
University of Nebraska
Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County
444 Cherry Creek Road • Suite A
Lincoln, Nebraska 68528-1507

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