The Road to Great (and Safe!) Grilling

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It's the lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer … but don't get too lazy about food safety during the summer grilling season. Or, your summer fun may turn into food poisoning! Here's a summary of food safety tips from the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Source: www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/barbecue-and-food-safety/ct_index

1 At the Store

When shopping, buy cold food like meat and poultry last, right before checkout. Separate raw meat and poultry from other food in your shopping cart. To guard against cross-contamination — which can happen when raw meat or poultry juices drip on other food — put packages of raw meat and poultry into plastic bags


2 Refrigerate Perishable Food Promptly

Plan to drive directly home from the grocery store. Always refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours. Refrigerate within 1 hour when the temperature is above 90°F.

At home, place meat and poultry in the refrigerator immediately. Freeze poultry and ground meat that won't be used in 1 or 2 days; freeze other meat within 4 to 5 days.
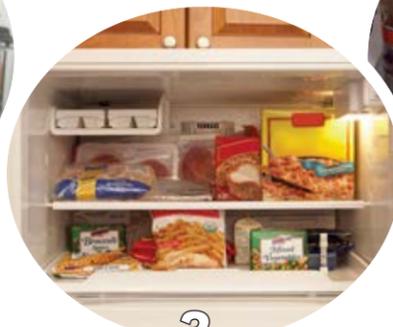
3 The Thaw Law

Completely thaw meat and poultry before grilling so it cooks more evenly. Use the refrigerator for slow, safe thawing. For quicker thawing, you can microwave defrost if the food will be placed immediately on the grill.

4 Marinate Meat Safely

Marinate food in the refrigerator, not on the counter. Poultry and cubed meat or stew meat can be marinated up to 2 days. Beef, veal, pork and lamb roasts, chops and steaks may be marinated up to 5 days.

If some of the marinade is to be used as a sauce on the cooked food, reserve a portion of the marinade before putting raw meat and poultry in it. However, if the marinade used on raw meat or poultry is to be reused, make sure to let it come to a boil first to destroy any harmful bacteria.

Photos from USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (unless otherwise noted)

5 Keep it Cold

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 40°F or below. Pack food right from the refrigerator into the cooler immediately before leaving home. Only take out the meat and poultry that will immediately be placed on the grill.

When using a cooler, 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.

Julie Corsi, flickr.com

6 Keep Everything Clean

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. Or pack clean cloths, and moist towelettes for cleaning surfaces and hands.

7 Cook it Correctly

Cook food to a safe minimum internal temperature to destroy harmful bacteria. Meat and poultry 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.

After cooking meat and poultry on the grill, keep it hot until served — at 140°F or warmer. Keep cooked meats hot by setting them to the side of the grill rack, not directly over the coals where they could overcook.

Nebraska Beef Council

8 Safe Minimum Internal Temperatures

- Whole poultry: 165°F
- Poultry breasts: 165°F
- Ground poultry: 165°F
- Ground meats: 160°F
- Beef, pork, lamb and veal (steaks, roasts and chops): 145°F and allow to rest at least 3 minutes.

For reasons of personal preference, consumers may choose to cook meat to higher temperatures.

lehto1, pixabay.com

9 Plate it Safely

When taking food off the grill, use a clean platter. Don't put cooked food on the same platter that held raw meat or poultry. Any harmful bacteria present in the raw meat juices could contaminate safely cooked food. In hot weather (above 90°F), food should never sit out for more than 1 hour (2 hours is OK if the temperature is under 90°F).