

## newsletter

... JULY 2011 ...

### QUICK TAKES

#### Why Food Poisoning Peaks in Warm Weather



Remember last summer's egg scare when half a billion eggs were recalled? Barely a week goes by without news of another outbreak of food-related illnesses or the recall of a contaminated food product. Foodborne illness -- also known as "food poisoning" -- is a serious public health threat. The hot, humid days of summer are known to increase the threat. Why?

First, the microbes that can contaminate food grow more rapidly in the warm summer months. Bacteria also need moisture to flourish, and summer weather is often quite humid.

Second, more people are cooking outside at picnics, barbecues and on camping trips. The safety controls that a kitchen provides -- thermostat-controlled cooking, refrigeration and access to hot water -- are usually not available.

## Summer Food Safety

Let's look at easy ways to minimize the risk of foodborne illness when preparing for your next barbecue or picnic. The experts at the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline have broken down safe cooking and handling practices into four simple steps: **Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill**.

### Clean

When preparing food, make sure you start with clean surfaces and clean hands. Hands should be washed with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before and after handling food. Equally important are the surfaces that come in contact with raw and cooked foods -- make sure they are clean before you start and are washed frequently. This is easy to do when the kitchen sink is just a few steps away. If you're camping or cooking outdoors, be sure to bring disposable hand wipes and surface wipes.

### Separate

Raw meats and poultry should be prepped separately from vegetables and cooked foods. As you chop meats and veggies, be sure to use separate cutting boards. Juices from raw meats can contain harmful bacteria that could spread to raw veggies and already cooked foods. When transporting raw meat and poultry to your picnic site, enclose in lock-tight plastic bags and place in the bottom of the cooler, away from other foods and drinks. Remember, don't use the same platter or utensils you've used for raw meats when handling other foods on the menu.

#### Don't Blame the Mayo!

Many summer picnickers hesitate to eat salads such as macaroni, potato or chicken salad because they fear the mayonnaise in the dressing could give them food poisoning. Stories of people getting sick from eating mayonnaise-based salads date to the days when mayonnaise was made from scratch using raw eggs. Yet homemade mayo has all but disappeared from America's kitchens today.

Bottled commercial mayonnaise has been around for a century or longer. It's made with pasteurized -- not raw -- eggs along with oil, an acid such as vinegar or lemon juice, and seasoned salt and other flavorings. Scientists have shown that acid in the mayonnaise can actually slow or even prevent the growth of bacteria that cause food poisoning.