

## Summer Tips for Keeping Food Safe and Healthy

Summer is here and, for many of us, this means time to enjoy outdoor cooking and eating with friends and family. As we plan our picnics, barbecues and reunions this summer, food safety should be part of our plans. Following a few simple steps can make a big difference.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), each year roughly 1 in 6 Americans (or 48 million people) get sick from contaminated food or beverages, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die of foodborne diseases ("food poisoning").

Some foods are more commonly associated with foodborne illnesses because they can carry germs that can make us very sick if the food is contaminated. The top six culprits for causing outbreaks of foodborne illnesses are chicken, pork, beef, fruits, turkey and leafy vegetables. Raw or undercooked meat and poultry can contain bacteria such as *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, or *E. coli*. Eating fresh fruits and veggies is important for our health, but they can sometimes be contaminated with *Salmonella*, *E. coli*, or *Listeria*. Proper handling of foods can help remove or destroy these germs.

The CDC gives us 4 tips to remember this summer, 4 steps to keep our food safe for ourselves, our families and our friends. The steps are: Clean, Separate, Cook, Chill.

1. **Clean:** Wash your hands and surfaces often.
  - Germs that cause food poisoning can survive in many places and spread around your kitchen.
  - Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water before, during, and after preparing food and before eating.
  - Wash your utensils, cutting boards, and countertops with hot, soapy water after preparing each food item.
  - Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running water.
2. **Separate:** Don't cross contaminate. Raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs can spread germs to ready-to-eat foods—unless you keep them separate.
  - Use separate cutting boards and plates for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
  - When grocery shopping, keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and their juices away from other foods.
  - Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs separate from all other foods in the refrigerator.
3. **Cook** to the right temperature. Food is safely cooked when the internal temperature gets high enough to kill germs that can make you sick. Don't rely on color and texture of the food - the only way to be sure the temperature is high enough to kill the germs is to use a food thermometer. The USDA recommends keeping hot foods above the temperature of 140° F and cold foods below 40° F in order to keep bacteria from multiplying. When reheating foods in the microwave, food should reach an internal temp of 165° F. Recommendations for grilling or cooking meats safely include the following temperature guidelines:

- Whole cuts of beef, veal, lamb, pork: 160° F (with a 3-minute wait time before carving or eating).
  - Hamburger and other ground meats: 160° F
  - Chicken and other poultry: 165° F
  - Fish: 145° F
4. Chill: Refrigerate promptly. It is also important to chill foods by refrigerating them promptly. Bacteria can multiply rapidly if left at room temperature or in the “Danger Zone” between 40°F and 140°F. Never leave perishable food out for more than 2 hours (or 1 hour if exposed to temperatures above 90°F).

Approximately half of foodborne illnesses across the U.S. can be attributed to norovirus (often called “stomach bug” or “stomach flu”), which is a virus that spreads very easily and quickly and that causes vomiting and diarrhea. It can spread from infected people to others and through contaminated foods and surfaces. Anyone can get infected and sick with norovirus and outbreaks are common. You can protect yourself and others from norovirus by: washing your hands often, rinsing fruits and vegetables, cooking shellfish thoroughly, staying home when you are sick and for two days after your symptoms stop, and by avoiding preparing food for others during that time.

Among the best defenses against foodborne illness is hand washing with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. Make sure you have an alcohol-based hand sanitizer handy for times when soap and water are not available. Activities such as gardening, fishing, helping out on a farm, playing with pets and outdoor play tend to increase in the summer months and can be associated with foodborne infection. To prevent contamination of food, promote frequent handwashing, especially after outdoor activities and before you prepare food.

So, remember to follow the 4 easy steps for keeping food safe: Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill! We wish you many healthy, safe and fun summer gatherings!

For more information about food safety and handling, visit <http://www.foodsafety.gov> or [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov) or contact your local health department <http://southheartlandhealth.org/>.

*Michele Bever is the executive director for South Heartland District Health Department, serving Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties in south central Nebraska. She may be reached at 402-462-6211 or toll free at 1-877-238-7595.*